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**Vijay Tendulkar**

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Nandana Datta*

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## INTRODUCTION

Vijay Dhondo Tendulkar (b. 1928) is an eminent Marathi playwright, screenplay writer, essayist, and journalist. He first came into prominence in the 1950s and 60s with one-act plays like *Ratra* (1957), *Ajagar ani gandharva* (1966) and *Bhekad* (1969). But his signature style began to develop clearly with his association with the experimental theatre movement, which was part of the advent of modernism in Marathi literature. With modernism came the break from the traditional musical drama, the plays with mythological and folk ingredients and the imitations of Shakespeare, and a growing concern with social and political themes. This also meant the influence of playwrights like Ibsen and Shaw, Ionesco, Pirandello, Strindberg and Brecht, and a strong emphasis on formal and thematic experimentation.

Tendulkar's close association with the experimental theatre movement began with the plays he wrote for amateur groups like Rangayan, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Kendra and Avishkar. The plays that he wrote between 1955 and 1964 were keen explorations of middle class life and the isolation and alienation of individuals from the world around them, and include *Manus navache bet* (*An Island called Man*)(1955), *Madhlya Bhinti* (*The Walls Between*) (1958), *Chimanicha ghar hota menacha* (*Nest of Wax*) (1958), *Mee jinklo Mee harlo* (*I Won, I Lost*) (1963), *Kavlanchi Shala* (*School for Crows*)(1963). His 1968 play, *Shantata, court chalu ahe* (*Silence! The Court is in Session*) brought him national recognition and a number of awards followed, among them the most prominent being the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Award and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1971. From this period onwards there is a dramatic change in his themes and treatment, an 'awareness of

the violent impulses behind a respectable façade and the overwhelming compulsions of sex' (*EIL* (5) 4310). Leela Benare (*Shantata . .*), Sakharām and Ghashirām all demonstrate this in their aggressive, offensive language and compulsively violent behaviour. There is in fact an interesting sidelight in the state response to these increasing critiques of various kinds of institutional violence and depictions of individuals caught in their grip. The Stage Performances Scrutiny Board, Government of Maharashtra, banned *Sakharām Binder*. The legal battle that followed resulted in the famous judgment of the Bombay High Court, setting aside a whole chapter of rules relating to the Board and vindicating theatrical freedom.

Other important plays include *Mitrachi Goshta* (*A Friend's Story*) (1982), *Kamala* (1982) and *Kanyadaan* (1983). Besides, Tendulkar has also written the screenplays of films like *Nishant* (directed by Shyam Benegal), *Aakrosh* (directed by Govind Nihalani) and *Akriet* (directed by Amol Palekar). In a parallel journalistic career, he has been the assistant editor of *Loksatta* and for a long time wrote a daily column for the *Maharashtra Times*. He has translated plays from other languages, among them Mohan Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure* (from the original Hindi) and Girish Karnad's *Tughlak* (from the original Kannada) and some of the plays of the American dramatist, Tennessee Williams. He is also an accomplished photographer and has published a collection of photographs called *Chehare* (*Faces*).

Many awards have marked his long and illustrious career. He received the Maharashtra State Government Award nine times. During 1974-1975, he was a recipient of the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship and his project included a study of "The

Pattern of Growing Violence in Society and its Relevance to Contemporary Theatre". He was vice president of the National School of Drama (NSD) from 1979 to 1984. In 1984 he also received the Padmabhushan. Most recently, he has been the recipient of the Katha Chudamani Award for 2001.

As Tendulkar's plays show, he is an individual deeply immersed in his times. His concern with all forms of oppression in society and within the family, his strong visual sense, tightly designed plots and profound sense of theatrical space, and a sure insight into dramatic characterization makes him an important figure in the Indian theatre scene.

### **Ghashirām Kotwal: Introduction**

*Ghashirām Kotwal* (English translation by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot) was first performed in the original Marathi on December 16, 1972, by the Progressive Dramatic Association at the Bharat Natya Mandir in Pune. It was directed by Jabbar Patel and the role of Ghashirām was played by Ramesh Tilekar while Mohan Agashe played Nana Phadnavis. After nineteen performances, however, the President of the Progressive Dramatic Association banned the play on the grounds that it was anti-Brahman and gave an inaccurate picture of the historical figure of Nana Phadnavis. Most of the actors resigned from the Association and formed Theatre Academy on March 27, 1973. The production was revived on January 11, 1974. Since then, popular and controversial, and always contemporary, the play has been produced in many Indian languages, and Theatre Academy has also performed it in several European countries. The NSD production, directed by Rajinder Nath for Nandikar's 17<sup>th</sup> National Theatre Festival, like Jabbar Patel's, stays true to the play's extensive use of traditional devices of the Marathi folk theatre.

*Historical context:* The play is set in Poona in the late eighteenth century during the last years of the rule of the Peshwa, Baji Rao II and his Chancellor Nana Phadnavis (also described as the Peshwa's chieftain, magistrate and in the play itself, as chief minister). Historical references to Nana are to his sagacity, his wisdom, and wiliness as a political negotiator during the reigns of Peshwa Madhav Rao I and II. He is credited with holding together the disintegrating Maratha Empire following the death of Peshwa Madhavrao I. Nana Phadnavis assumed the office of chief minister to Baji Rao II on December 4, 1796. There was always an uncomfortable relationship, the Peshwa even having him arrested at one point. A hint of this is evident in the play in the threat of complaint about Nana's lechery to the Peshwa by Ghashiram, and in the tardiness with which Nana responds to the Peshwa's summons at the end. He is often referred to as the Maratha Machiavelli and the Machiavellian aspect is shown by Tendulkar in the way Nana plays off Ghashiram, the Brahman from Kanauj, against the Brahmans of Poona, makes him the kotwal so that he can use him as a scapegoat for his own misdeeds and, at least twice, talks of killing two birds with one stone – once when he makes Ghashiram the kotwal, and again at the end when he throws Ghashiram to the mob. One of the reasons stated for the banning of the play by the President of the Progressive Theatre Association was that the audience would not take kindly to the legendary figure of Nana being shown as debauched and evil.

Ghashiram, as Tendulkar himself tells us, was a minor figure of that period and therefore offers great scope to the playwright to flesh him out to suit the play's representation of socio-political issues of our time.

The Brahmans were the most privileged of the various classes in Poona during this period, since they were also the class in power. While the government formulated a strict code of behaviour for them it also assured that they enjoyed the highest social status. They were granted a great deal of license and this is probably one of the incidental issues that attracted Tendulkar, allowing him to show that decadence could very well be the result of undeserved or excessive privilege. In the play, an interesting aspect of their preeminence is seen, as there is almost total absence of the other castes.

On being questioned about the historicity of the play, Tendulkar very firmly states: 'This is not a historical play. It is a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them, of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis, or Ghashiram.' On being asked whether the play sought to expose Brahman corruption and pretensions, he replied, 'The decadence of the class in power (the Brahmans, incidentally, during the period which I had to depict) also was incidental, though not accidental.'

Since *Ghashiram Kotwal* continues to be a popular play, Tendulkar has commented on it in various contexts. At one point he says, 'Ghashiram started with a theme, then came the specific 'story' or incident which was historical.' Also pertinent to the theme of the play is his statement: 'I had in mind the emergence, the growth, and the inevitable end of the Ghashiram; also those who create, and help Ghashirams to grow; and the irony of stoning to death a person pretending that it is the end of Ghashirams.' Written and performed in the

years leading up to the Emergency, which is considered to be the darkest period in the history of independent India, when the basic freedoms – to act, speak and think – became casualties, the play's depiction of absolute authority unleashed on the people must now appear to have been prophetic. When we speak of historical context, therefore, it is as necessary to be aware of the play's actual historical background, as it is important to recall when it was written and performed, and to be sensitive to the context in which it comes to us with each new performance.

*Themes:* Since the play is set in a particular historical context, it is possible to locate its themes in this context. The idea that would strike a reader immediately is that of a *dominant class*, the Brahmins, enjoying many privileges but also revealed as taking advantage of their position and their proximity to the ruler. We see them breaking class codes and indulging themselves. Nana's participation in their revels in Bavannakhani suggests that they have the protection of the ruler and therefore feel secure despite their violations of the Brahman code.

The portraits of Nana and Ghashiram help develop *the idea of authority or power* – Nana used to having it and therefore relaxed in exercising it over people below him, Ghashiram newly powerful, and therefore carried away by it and engaging in violent and brutal demonstrations. However it becomes apparent from a comparison of these two representations of the theme of authority that at bottom they do not differ significantly from each other.

Power of different kinds is seen in many of Tendulkar's plays and it is commonly acknowledged that *Ghashiram Kotwal* is about the power of the state and its institutions or

its various organs. But it is his probing and investigative approach to its operation in human relationships that is most striking – how within various institutionalized power structures individuals use one another. Both Nana and Ghashiram as authority figures show a remarkable callousness about people, caring little about the effects of their actions or their decisions on others. They display an equal degree of selfishness and a similar willingness to use people to reach their own goals and Tendulkar's ethical concern is most prominent here – in his understanding of one's relationship to others who are different from oneself, belonging to a lower economic or social status or the opposite sex.

In the context of our times, in our increasingly polarized and violent societies, it may be interesting to note how Tendulkar treats the ideas of *insularity* and *violence*. The city of Poona is regarded almost as personal property by the Brahmins. They close ranks against the outsider, making it difficult for him to earn a living, humiliating him and banishing him from the city. It is only in the aftermath of such treatment that the worst elements of Ghashiram's character come to the fore and the brutal Ghashiram Kotwal is born.

On violence, Tendulkar has admitted in *A Testament*, written in 1992: 'I feel fascinated by the violent exploiter-exploited relationship and obsessively delve deep into it instead of taking a position against it.' In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, he explores how and why violence erupts. We are shown the violent treatment meted out to the outsider, the Brahmin from Kanauj, and the threat of violence behind the permit-system in Ghashiram's rule stunning the people into a state of apathy. We see it in the brutal ordeal conducted to establish the truth and, finally, we are given an example of mob violence – mob anger satisfied

only with bloodshed. Behind these varieties of violence is the authority and sanction of the state.

Samik Bandyopadhyay, in his 'Introduction' to the *Collected Plays in Translation* (OUP, 2003), suggests that 'the sheer thrill of the musical does to a certain extent weaken the thrust of the satire, and the sting is blunted.' But an angrier satire may not have been capable of such a telling picture of society and politics. The disguised play of power and the camouflaging of evil neatly represent the many ways in which the real face of power is disguised by social and familial codes, rituals, and habits. And the distancing and objectivity that the form facilitates are necessary to recognize, understand, and evaluate these issues.

*Characterization:* A character in a play is a part of the general atmosphere and themes with which the playwright is concerned. He or she should not be taken out of this very distinct context. About his characters Tendulkar says that 'each of them has his or her own separate existence and expression' but this is within the framework set up for each play. In this sense, the Brahmans, Gulabi, Gauri, Ghashiram, or Nana, or even the minor figures like the Brahman wife and the Maratha landowner may each be individualized through distinctive expression or linguistic style, appearance, or gait. And it is important to recall here Tendulkar's assertion that no character is modeled on one single individual but comes into being as a result of his experience and encounters with many similar kinds of people. Ghashiram, for instance, is the culmination of such a process because he seems to represent so many others like him who are caught in the traps set by those in power and whose period of powerful ascendancy is

based on the shaky foundation of Nana's continuing passion for Gauri.

Ghashiram is a product of the play's ambience and the movement of his character – from an ordinary man trying to make a living, attempting to get into Nana's good graces through the obsequious service performed at their first meeting, seeking to better himself, and then in the decadent atmosphere of Poona, bargaining for the kotwali, using his daughter as the exchange, and then falling into Nana's trap while attempting to trap Nana – is very much within the play's concerns.

Ghashiram's first appearance is in Gulabi's hall in Bavannakhani, dancing erotically with her, and the stage direction describes him as 'her foil. Sycophant. Ludicrous.' Later in the scene it is revealed that Gulabi is his employer: 'He washes my utensils. Sings for me. Does all sorts of things.' This initial servitude sets the tone for the first stage of his path in the play. Beginning as Gulabi's servant/tool, he graduates to becoming a servant to both Nana and to his own excessive desire for power.

His encounter with Nana contains a powerful visual image of servility. He first supports Nana's injured foot on his back, and then taking it in his hand, he introduces himself and establishes the fact that he is an outsider, a Brahman from Kanauj, a foreigner in the city of Poona. Ghashiram is therefore not likely to be a part of any group or faction in the city, a piece of information that is filed away by Nana, to be used later when he turns Ghashiram's demand for the kotwali in exchange for his daughter to his own advantage, setting him up to tyrannize the Brahmans who are apparently conspiring against him.

Ghashiram's misfortunes begin when he is falsely accused and arrested as a thief, and then released and banished from Poona. His words as he leaves the scene are prophetic. The humiliation he has suffered is more than he can bear – Poona is a city that gives so many privileges to the Brahmans, but this Kanauj Brahman receives no respect. He is instead branded a criminal and it is this injury to his ego that propels his wily bargain with Nana and his aggressive rule as the Kotwal.

Immediately after this the audience will see Ghashiram in the guise of a servant, his face hidden to avoid being recognized. At this point, he is powerful because he leads Nana into the trap without Nana discovering him. But the moment of victory is also the moment of defeat. See the division in the line, 'Now he's in my hands...Oh, my daughter', expressing both triumph and despair, revealing how deeply conscious he is of what he has done for the sake of revenge. It is with his heart full of despair and revulsion for himself that he pushes the bargain through – the kotwali of Poona in exchange for his daughter.

In Act Two we see Ghashiram as tyrant and oppressor, implementing the cynical permit system: Get a permit and you can do anything – commit the most heinous crime – without it you are vulnerable, liable to be caught and punished with death. As he had promised, Ghashiram unleashes a reign of terror in Poona, believing himself to be all-powerful. The play however repeatedly draws attention to the impermanence of his power. 'Gauri dances, Nana does, Ghashiram's reign is here.' This sentence suggests the severe limits under which he is functioning. The Nana we are shown is a debauch who is unlikely to be satisfied with Gauri for long. When he tires of Gauri, he will also cease to bother about Ghashiram's fate. And

it is important to note that even when Nana is utterly consumed by lust, his wily brain keeps working. It is he who is using Ghashiram. As he says at the end of Act One, 'Ghashya, child, you're a foreigner. I have put you on Poona's back. Why? As a countercheck to all those conspirators. You'll not be able to join them; they'll never trust you even if you do.' By driving a wedge between Ghashiram and the people of Poona, Nana succeeds in strengthening his own hand.

As Ghashiram performs the role of Kotwal, we notice a certain numbness in him – a senseless absorption in violence; he is immune to the pain he is causing and quite uncaring of its consequences for himself. The exchange with the Sutradhar turned man-with-the-pregnant-wife shows the whole issue of permits for everything as ridiculous and also points to Tendulkar's critique of the functioning of institutions that make people blind and prevent them from questioning the rules on which they are founded. The brutalization that comes with the complacency of power is shown in the ordeal ordered by Ghashiram. Ghashiram himself participates in the ordeal and seems to derive a perverse pleasure from it.

The reign of terror stuns the Brahmans of Poona into immobility – note how the dance and music of Act One is almost absent, and the rhythm to which the chorus swayed and slowed down. They are on edge, and the Sutradhar, speaking of Ghashiram Raj, makes the telling comment: 'The bad deeds were cooled down – The good deeds were cooled down too.' Ghashiram's speech, following the Sutradhar's comment, marks a climax in his career. He believes at this point that he is invincible. 'No one dares to look Ghashiram straight in the eye!' This entire speech contains several points that illumine what has happened and what is to happen.



Though it is Nana who has taken his daughter, his main target has always been the Brahmans of Poona who have never seen him as one of them, and it is against them that he has wanted to prove himself. A sense of his own power overwhelms him here. The Brahmans are now cowed down, he has money, jewels and respect, and he can buy a husband for his dishonoured daughter. He fails to see how empty these proud claims are, the power he wields blinding him to the reality of his situation, and that he is a mere pawn in Nana's hands.

Ghashiram comes to his senses briefly when he discovers that his daughter is dead and Nana is pursuing another young girl. But he returns to the Kotwal's duties with renewed vigour and even greater brutality until the Brahmans go to Nana in protest. When the end comes, like all tragic heroes, he has a moment of profound insight. He welcomes death with the statement, 'I should be punished for the death of my daughter.' He admits here that his Brahman ego and his desire for revenge, combined with a mad thirst for power, were responsible for his downfall.

Ghashiram is a small man caught in the midst of forces he cannot withstand. But even as he is shown as the victim of external forces, Tendulkar also portrays him as a man whose personal ambitions made it possible for those external forces to get a grip on him. Tendulkar might also be hinting at the fate of the marginalized figure, the foreigner or the outsider, in our social space. It may be interesting to read the play in the light of the recent outcry over the influx of outsiders into the city of Mumbai, or for that matter for students in the north east, to keep in mind the movement against foreigners in the early 80s, which became a movement against outsiders and people from other states as well. Bringing these contemporary events

to bear on the play could facilitate a deeper engagement with the play's concerns and a better understanding of Ghashiram's character.

While Tendulkar begins his portrayal of *Nana* from the historical figure of *Nana Phadnavis*, the same process of developing and fleshing out a character that he suggested was at work in the case of Ghashiram, is also present here. Nana is the type of the wily, unscrupulous politician who is as true of our times as he would have been two hundred years ago. His debauched lifestyle, his compulsive lechery, and his enjoyment of music and dance are extensions of power and the wealth that comes in its wake. He is also shown as an extremely clever man – the historical Nana was known for his guile and political acumen – who actually relishes the prospect of manipulating people, using their weaknesses to gain control over them, and employing them for his own ends.

Nana's first appearance on stage with silver-handled walking stick and flowers at his wrist, and immediately joining in the erotic dance, is a dramatic way of establishing his character. The first scene where he appears in fact presents both aspects of his personality – that of the debauch and that of the politician who enjoys showing his power and being recognized for it. In the first encounter between Ghashiram and Nana, Nana's appreciation of the servility displayed by Ghashiram establishes this second aspect – his ability and willingness to use people, to observe their traits and keep in mind how and when they may be employed to his advantage. The gift of the necklace becomes a kind of investment made by Nana for the future, at the same time showing how those in power thrive on the adulation of people around them. The next time Nana appears, it is at a kirtan, where he sees the

young Gauri and develops a passion for her, willing to do anything to possess her. The profanation of the sacred – seen here in the way he ogles the women at the religious gathering – is an important aspect of the portrayal of Nana. At his arrival, the kirtan with its abhanga changes into a lavani, and it is through him that the idea of Mathura and Bavannakhani blending and meshing into one another is suggested. Towards the end of the play, facing the grieving and raging Ghashiram, Nana blasphemously takes on the role of Krishna and speaks of the transitoriness of life in a parody of the famous scene in the Mahabharata where Krishna convinces the hesitant Arjuna to fight. He is also shown performing religious rituals, which sheds more light on the ugly aspects of his character.

Nana's attitudes to people, religion, and social mores and relationships suggest a man who is completely devoid of moral considerations, who has taken the idea of 'use' to its extreme, and it is possible to see in him the essential qualities of the typical politician whose professional success depends on his absolute amorality at the personal and public levels. It is therefore apt that the model for such a man should have been the historical Nana Phadnavis whose success seems to have been based on his ability to play off various factions against one another. In the play, Nana's speech after he has made Ghashiram the Kotwal is particularly significant because it draws attention to this aspect of his character: 'This time there are two bullets in this gun. With the first one we will fell your luscious daughter. But with the second we will make the city of Poona dance.' With one stroke he changes a situation in which he seemed to have been at a disadvantage into one of advantage for himself – at the personal level fulfilling his passion for Gauri, and at the public, political level, taking the wind out of the sails of his enemies.

Nana repeats this exercise at the end of the play, when, confronted with an angry and possibly dangerous Ghashiram, he concedes the Brahmans' demand for Ghashiram's execution – getting rid of an enemy at the personal level, but also winning over the Brahmans to his side.

The Sutradhar and the Chorus of Brahmans are not characters in the sense that Ghashiram and Nana are. They are theatrical devices, fluid and malleable, changing with the needs of the story, and used by Tendulkar with most telling dramatic effect.

The *Sutradhar*, or narrator, one who holds the 'sutra' or thread of a story, is a traditional element in Indian theatrical performances. He observes, gives information, comments, indicates scene changes, but also blends into and out of the story. He takes on several roles, becoming in quick succession, a cynical prisoner who tells Ghashiram about police power in Poona, a kirtankar or Haridasa, and the man-with-the-pregnant-wife. Each of these roles is necessary for the progress of the play and in order to develop either themes or the characters of Nana and Ghashiram. After each brief performance he reverts to his original role of Sutradhar.

The *Chorus of Brahmans* stands on the sidelines of the drama, sustaining its musical chant. But individual members frequently leave the line and adopt roles in the action, playing various Brahman figures. Collectively they also represent the people of the city, first under Nana's rule in Act One and then, in the second Act, under the direct rule of Ghashiram Kotwal, in each case marked by the character of the figure in authority. In fact it is interesting to note how the character of the Chorus changes from Act One to Act Two. Under Nana, it is as debauched as he is, portraying Brahmans frequenting

Bavannakhani, pursuing pleasures beyond their calling and quite conscious of their power as the dominant class in Poona. In the second Act, they are a frightened, tentative group, living under the tyrant's yoke, in constant fear for their lives. Subjected to torture, herded into prison in large numbers, suffocating to death – Brahmans are no longer dominant. But the final revolt changes the character of the Chorus again – first, into the angry mob, which clamours for Ghashiram's execution and is appeased by Nana, and then into the debauched group of the beginning. This versatile theatrical device contributes to the establishment of the atmosphere of the play and serves as a barometer that registers the changes taking place in the city of Poona. The Chorus also neatly performs the functions of several props when these become necessary. They form at different periods, a curtain, a palanquin, a little temple or god house for Ganapati, and a garden.

Finally, since Tendulkar has delineated powerful female figures in several of his plays it is of some interest to see how he portrays women in this play. Given the milieu in which the play is set, the women are minor figures and almost incidental to the play's concerns. We see several kinds of women: Gulabi, representing Bavannakhani and the prostitutes, a character as well as an aspect of the play's ambience; the Brahman wife and her lover; the second Brahman woman forced out of her house and accused of being a prostitute; and Gauri and the seventh bride, young and innocent, representing all the young women preyed upon by people like Nana, made into objects of exchange by men. This cast of female characters helps to create the typical milieu of the play, but their status primarily as sex objects suggests what they are in

the play – pawns and playthings in the political game of Nana and Ghashiram.

*Structure:* The play has been called a folk musical. It uses the tamasha, a folk theatre form that developed in Maharashtra in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and offered bawdy entertainment to rural audiences. As the Cambridge Guide to Theatre tells us, 'Tamasha satirizes and pokes fun at contemporary society often at the expense of politicians and businessmen, priests and prophets, under the guise of historical or mythological stories.' It begins with a song in praise of the gods and is followed by a satirical representation that often draws on historical figures and incidents. Its bawdy ambience is created through the lavani or popular love songs that are accompanied by erotic and highly suggestive dances. The tamasha is similar to the khela of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The khela begins with prayers to Ganapati and includes invocations to other gods and goddesses as well. The drama, which follows, may be mythological or semi-historical. It is possible to see elements from both these forms in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, in the opening invocation to Ganapati, the figure of the sutradhar and the chorus, the musical framework, the creation and maintenance of an atmosphere of sexual license and revelry, the use of a historical incident and historical figures, and the satire that is directed at authority, institutions, and individual delusions of power.

For students of the play, it may be interesting to note that Marathi adaptations of the plays of Bertolt Brecht, especially *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* directed by Vijaya Mehta and *Threepenny Opera* directed by Jabbar Patel, have drawn on the tamasha. With the advent of modernism in various Indian literatures came a greater social consciousness and experi-

mentation with forms. In Marathi theatre, the influence of dramatists like Henrik Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, Eugene Ionesco, Luigi Pirandello, August Strindberg, and Bertolt Brecht is evident not only in the Marathi adaptations of their plays but also in the new plays written by playwrights associated with the Progressive Theatre Movement which had an overt Marxist affiliation. *Ghashiram Kotwal* demonstrates this in its themes of power and powerlessness, and in its unique combination of Marathi folk theatre elements with devices of lighting and music to indicate states of mind (note the beat of drums that accompanies Ghashiram's angry dance in Act One) that see to draw from expressionist techniques. The distancing achieved through the historical frame of the story – dealing in contemporary social and political issues but transplanting them all to a historical distance in order to achieve a defamiliarizing effect – is very similar to Brechtian epic theatre. The tamasha and khela facilitate this as much as Brecht's epic theatre methods. As in Brecht, the audience is enabled to step back from the play and take a keen critical look at the issues represented. Tendulkar's social commitment and his continued interest in the issue of violence at the personal and institutional levels encourage us to read his plays not only as being about 'people like us' but as social commentary through which we may introspect about our societies and ourselves. And this is possible when we identify with a play's themes and characters but can still take an objective view of them.

Tendulkar has achieved this effect in various ways in different plays. In *Ghashiram Kotwal* it is the form of the folk musical that has proved most useful in evoking an historical era but in simultaneously making it contemporary and relevant. The last years of the Peshwai, the importance of the city of

Poona, the historical figures of Nana Phadnavis and Ghashiram Kotwal, and of course the dominant class in Poona, the Brahmans – these elements that constitute the story of the play are distanced by the typical look, mannerisms and the musical effects, and the audience's knowledge that it all happened two hundred years ago. But as the characters and themes develop, we recognize Nana and Ghashiram and the Brahmans as existing around us and within us and this is a significant aspect of the play's dramatic effect.

Within the framework of the tamasha, the play also makes an effective use of mime. In the scene of the ordeal, the torturers and the victim mime the brutal ordeal itself, the various stages of the elaborate ceremony leading up to it. This overt theatricality, the constant reminder to the audience that they are watching a performance that can only work with their participation in the sign system being used is an aspect of the same distancing effect through which the play succeeds. The act of wrapping Gauri's body and throwing it into the river is mimed, as also the pre-marriage rituals before Nana's wedding and the pulling out of corpses from the prison.

While the tamasha and its various components provide a framework or a form, it is the deft employment of the mobile and versatile Chorus – the line of twelve men – along with the traditional figure of the Sutradhar, that offers a strong foundation, a structure, for the development of all the themes and the two characters of Nana and Ghashiram. The play is held together by the moods and emotions suggested by the Chorus, by questions raised at crucial moments by the Sutradhar, the chants, the lavani and the abhanga they sing, and the sounds of various kinds of percussion and stringed instruments that they together produce as accompaniment and

background to the uncontrollable emotions and passions that are raised – sexual passion, the passion for revenge, and the mad passion to hold on to power. The two acts show the figure of Ghashiram in two different states – and the play develops its themes around his low beginnings and the rise to power in the first act, and the brutalization and downfall brought on by power in the second. The frenzied pace and the constant occupation of the stage are also elements that produce the typical atmosphere of the tragedy – of Ghashiram's swift rise and fall.

*Reading the Play:* Unlike other literary forms, the play is dependent for its effect on the skill with which the written text, the 'story', is supplemented by indicators of place, time, and mood, on interpretation through visual and sound techniques by the director and the actors, and the way all of these communicate issues or themes to an audience. Tendulkar himself points to the way a play may be approached. In the second Sri Ram Memorial Lecture, 'The Play is the Thing', he says that a playwright must 'know how the actor stands there in front of the audience in the dark and projects the word, the voice, the character', understand 'the utilization of silence in a dialogue', have a keen sense of 'the visual element in the theatre', and know how best to fill the empty space of the stage.

Keeping all this in mind, the question we need to address is: How do we *read* a play? Or, is it possible to *read* a play effectively in the classroom where none of these extra-textual elements are available. A good play is distinguished by the playwright's sense of the dramatic – his knowledge of how an action or a character is represented by an actor, and where and how actors stand or move about on the stage. He inserts into

the play signs or messages that an audience would pick up and respond to. It is therefore possible to read a play by paying close attention to these indicators – the theatrical devices used (the chorus, sutradhar, the music, mime, report of events taking place off-stage, and so on); how do characters enter and exit, how are they dressed, what do they carry with them, what is the location where a scene takes place (is it indefinite like the first scene, or is it the temple, Gulabi's house, or the prison, etc.); is it night or day (the early morning or dawn is an important time in this play). Much of this information may be given in the form of stage directions, as in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, or in many other modern plays, where the playwright keeps control of the way his text may be interpreted.

*Ghashiram Kotwal* begins with prayers to Ganapati for its success and also includes invocations to Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom and music – appropriate for the play's formal basis in music, and to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. This may be seen as foreshadowing the themes of the play where Ghashiram's quest for power and wealth undercuts his good sense and he becomes a pawn in Nana's hands. As the invocation ends and the Sutradhar and Chorus take on their roles, the 'twelve men standing in a line' quickly change to become the Poona Brahmans. The line 'We the Poona Brahmans bow and prance' captures the mood of the first Act, which is one of entertainment, revelry, and license. It does not appear in the second Act, except at the end, in the last lines, when Ghashiram has been removed and the Brahmans restored to their original position. It would therefore be necessary to attend closely to the way this chorus functions, dissolving and reforming, to create a social milieu against which the play's themes develop. The Sutradhar in

conjunction with the Chorus asks pertinent questions and points to details that are part of the dramatic effect. The chorus, for instance, functions most of the time as a group, but when one of its members steps out and becomes a character, it is the Sutradhar who aids this transformation and propels the action forward. This is how one might see the Sutradhar breaking up the chorus into its individual components – Vedantic scholar, doctor ... with his first question 'Who are you?' Soon after that there is a similar individualization when the stage direction tells us: "A Brahman ... stealthily tries to sneak off stage" and the Sutradhar immediately pounces on him with his questions, eventually discovering the reasons for the stealthy attempt to exit – that instead of going about legitimate Brahman business, he is sneaking off to Bavannakhani. When the second Brahman leaves the line and bumps into the Sutradhar, he is affronted and the Sutradhar calms him down by touching his feet. This scene points to the class structure in the city of Poona and to Brahman dominance that are necessary for Ghashiram's story. The group of three wealthy Brahmans who are next questioned reveal that they too are headed for Bavannakhani. The Sutradhar's questions and the answers given establish several things: one, that the Brahmans are supposed to adhere to a certain code of behaviour – go to the temple, or the cemetery, or attend a kirtan, not visit prostitutes; two, that this is a regime where the Brahmans are regularly violating this code, proving that they are privileged, and protected by the administration; and three, that religion and religious rituals are being used to camouflage various kinds of nefarious activities. We hear echoes of these issues throughout the play. Note how at this point the chorus dissolves completely and the

individuals "start to go out quickly" all rushing to Bavannakhani.

The scene change is signaled by the Sutradhar playing a dholki and singing, 'The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani'. The Brahmans come back as a curtain and chant to the beat of the mridanga drum. The mridanga, usually played with the religious chant or the kirtan, here accompanies the chant-turned-signature tune for Bavannakhani, 'Bavannakhani... Mathura avatarli'. The scene is now Gulabi's house. The Brahmans become the audience to the erotic dancing. Ghashiram appears as partner to Gulabi in the Brahman-Brahman wife dance and just as the sutradhar mentions the poor Brahman women who are left at home while their husbands enjoy themselves, we see the 'Brahman woman with a saucy air', entertaining a lover, breaking down the division between Brahman wife and Gulabi, the 'respectable' woman and the prostitute. The climax of this scene comes with Nana's arrival at Gulabi's house.

Nana enters 'to a tabla rhythm', carrying a 'silver-handled walking stick' and with a 'garland of flowers on wrist'. The tabla, different in its capacity to produce a greater variety of sounds than the dholki or the mridanga played for the chorus earlier, may imitate Nana's mincing gait. The stick and flowers are part of his role, the walking stick denoting both age and authority, but with its silver handle, probably also an affectation. The flowers at his wrist are appropriate for the way he will appear for the most part – one who visits the prostitutes, ogles women even at the kirtan, pursues a girl young enough to be his daughter, and marries seven times, the last bride just fourteen.

The dance that follows fills the space of the stage: Brahmans, Gulabi, Nana and Ghashiram dance, and in front of them dance the Brahman wives and their lovers – two different locales being suggested simultaneously through the two sets of dancers. It is also important to note that the erotic dancing is accompanied by the religious chant, 'Radhakrshna Hari....' As Nana hobbles, the dancers part to show Ghashiram bending and offering his back for him to rest his foot (369). This is a powerful image indicating that Nana has all of Poona groveling at his feet and the exchange that follows, with Ghashiram ever more servile and Nana pleased enough to make a gift of his pearl necklace, presents a telling picture of sycophancy tolerated by a leader and breeding jealousy in those around, and of absolute power that dehumanizes both the powerful and the powerless. It is also interesting to note the play of power in the Gulabi-Ghashiram relationship, the employer and the employed, when Gulabi harshly demands the necklace, and on Ghashiram's refusal, has him beaten up. In each case it is personal satisfaction that is sought, not a more general benefit. Nana is pleased at Ghashiram's deference, and Gulabi is impelled by greed (for the necklace) and affronted at her servant's disobedience. The white man's arrival in a palanquin and the Brahmans fawning over him offers another image that is part of the play's display of authority and accompanying corruption. While the Brahmans expect deference from the other classes, they are not averse to being servile when it benefits them. Visually this scene would be most effective. 'To the beat of a drum, the palanquin of a white man comes on the stage. . . . ' 'The Sahib is coming .. Step aside ....' Here the British officer is literally above the Brahmans who are running below and before his palanquin – a picture of servility that recalls Ghashiram with Nana's foot in his hands. The instance

of the Brahmans offering different rates to sneak the Sahib in to a ceremony that is strictly a Brahman affair prepares for the large number of permits in Act Two that may be had for all misdemeanours and crimes.

Ghashiram's marginalization, which is necessary for the development of the play's display of the abuse of power, is dramatically achieved in several ways. Since he is an outsider, he looks different from the Poona Brahmans. The play keeps drawing attention to this: 'Gulabi and Ghashiram bow ...reappear as Brahman and Brahman wife. Big stomach and long tuft of hair.' Later accused of stealing, his claim that he too is a Brahman is not accepted by the soldiers: 'Where is your shaven head ... holy thread, ...pious look ... holy book?' And when he is banished from Poona, we have a particularly impressive depiction of his isolation: 'On stage: Brahmans, Brahman women, Gulabi, the Maratha lovers, etc. all stand and look down on Ghashiram' who has been thrown out into the audience – the bunch of people on one side and Ghashiram alone and at a level below them. This scene visually reinforces the movement of the play – a necessary emphasis that will keep before the audience's eyes the isolation of Ghashiram and enable them to better appreciate his transformation into the tyrant who is still alone but who is now above them in position and power. The significance of this picture becomes apparent in the last stage direction of Act One: 'The din grows louder and louder. . . . ' Ghashiram the Kotwal enters wearing 'glittering clothes . . . . Arrogance in his step. Seems different, larger than life . . . . ' In place of the fearful, cringing figure, he is now erect, proud, larger than life, moving grandly across the stage and surrounded by people 'walking backward, gesturing in deference, hand towards forehead.' The play again brings us starkly back to the theme, when Ghashiram, having

discovered that his daughter Gauri is dead and Nana is marrying for the seventh time, stands quietly to one side as the wedding ceremony proceeds, once again isolated, unnoticed by everyone else on the stage despite still being the Kotwal. This is a moment of deep anguish and a growing sense of futility for the bereaved father, pointed out for the audience by this particular arrangement of figures on the stage and it also prepares for the period of senseless violence that follows. Note how this skilful way of managing the space of the stage is repeated at the end, when once again it is Ghashiram on one side and the mob on the other, stoning him, hitting him, while the drums beat furiously. The isolation that has been indicated right through the play now reaches its inevitable and logical conclusion as Ghashiram is cornered and killed.

At the end of the play there is the final scene that opens up its meaning through an attention to sights and sounds. Ghashiram has been killed and is lying on the floor of the stage. The stage direction tells us: 'Nana enters in a palanquin with the chief minister's pomp. Royal clothing. Gets down . . . raises one hand to calm the crowd.' Then in the next direction: 'He nudges the corpse of Ghashiram with his walking stick.' Besides bringing the play round to the mood and state of affairs of the beginning this circular movement suggests what Tendulkar has tried to show us – that the exercise of power continues in much the same way and there is always scope for other Ghashirams to emerge, since nothing has really changed. That gesture of Nana's – of nudging the body as if it were a dead animal on the street – adds the final touches to the portraits of both Nana and Ghashiram, and shows us Ghashiram's place within the play. He is once again flat on the ground, below and separate from the rest.

Several other things may be noted as the play is read. First, *the kind of musical instruments played, when they are played and the mood created*. For example, the sensuous music in the Bavannakhani scenes is contrasted with the frenzied beat of drums at several points in the play especially during Ghashiram's angry dance in Act One and when the mob attacks him in Act Two. Or the way the religious music changes into the sensuous, and the haridasa who is supposed to be performing the kirtan, begins to sing a lavani. Second, *the times of day*. For instance, night time in Act One brings with it dance, music, and sexual indulgence, whereas in Act Two it brings Ghashiram and his police force roaming the streets, looking into people's houses and arresting individuals for crimes they may or may not have committed. Again, the dawn is heralded with the raga Bhupali in Act One, while in Act Two, with dawn comes the discovery of corpses in the prison cell.

Attention to details of this kind which abound in the play would bring the readers closer to the spirit of the play and make the actual reading a more interesting experience than if one were to simply read the text to get at the story of the play.

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GHASHIRAM KOTWAL was first performed on 16 December 1972 by the Progressive Dramatic Association in Pune with the following cast and crew:

Ghashiram Savaldas	: Ramesh Tilekar
Nana Phadnavis	: Mohan Agashe
Sutradhar (narrator)	: Shreeram Ranade
Pariparshwak (main singers)	: Ravindra Sathe
	Chandrakant Kale
Lalita Gauri	: Sujal Watve/Swaroop
	Khopkar
Gulabi	: Rajani Chavan
Ingraz (British Officer)	: Vidhyadhar Watve
Brahmins (chorus)	: Suresh Basale
	Nandu Pole
	Shrikant Gadre
	Sunil Kulkarni
	Uday Lagu
	Ramesh Medhekar
	Shreeram Pendse
	Arvind Thakar
	Prakash Arjunwadkar
	Milind Dongre
	Dilip Gokhale
	Anil Bhagwat
	Rahul Ranade
Brahmini	: Gauri Palande
	Mrinal Pande
	Suraj Watve
	Swaroop Khopkar
Musicians:	
Pakhawaj and Mridangam	: Shrikant Rajpathak
Tabla and Dholki	: Ashok Gaikwad

Harmonium	: Shyam Bhonde
Sundri	: Prabhashankar Gaikwad
Director	: Jabbar Patel
Music	: Bhaskar Chandavarkar
Choreography	: Krishnadev Mulgund
Lighting	: Samar Nakhate
Set Designer	: Suresh Basale
Assistant Director	: Satish Alekar
Stage Managers	: Shridhar Rajguru
Asst. Stage Managers	: Arvind Thakar
	Dilip Gokhale
Costumes	: Jadhav Natya Sansar, Pune
Make up	: Nivrutti Dalvi

## ACT ONE

*Twelve men standing in a line, sing. Ganapati comes in.*

ALL (*swaying to and fro*).

Ganapati dances the Ganapati dance,  
Brahmans of Poona bow and prance. (*Repeat.*)

Pious Brahmans,

Keep on dancing,

Holy Ganapati,

Keep on dancing.

Now let the drum beat!

Now let the drama heat!

Heaven, hell and earth complete!

Heaven, hell and earth complete!

Saraswati-devi,

Goddess of wisdom.

*Saraswati enters dancing. Ganapati and Saraswati dance.*

Goddess of wisdom,

Wife of the Great One.

Shri Ganaraya,

Image of good luck,

Even the mountains

Bow to your name.

Play, Saraswati,

Goddess of music.

Come, Lakshmi-devi,

Wife of the Great One,

Bow to the good God.

Both of you dance.

*Lakshmi comes in and dances with the two.*

Shri Ganaraya,

Now you must bless us.

All that we ask for—

Success for this play!

Blessed image—morya!

Ganapati bappa—morya!

Blessed image

Ganapati bappa!

*This is repeated. The tempo increases. It ends with 'mor...ya'!*

*Ganapati, Lakshmi and Saraswati go off stage.*

Blesser of Pundalik, Hari, Vitthal,

Dnyanadev, Tukaram.

*Again, slower, deeper, rhythmically*

Ganapati dances the Ganapati dance.

We the Poona Brahmans bow and prance.

We the pious Brahmans bow and prance.

SUTRADHAR. (*saying 'Ho Ho' to all, stops the singing*).

These are all Brahmans from Poona.

Who are you?

ONE MAN. A Vedantic scholar.

SUTRADHAR. You?

SECOND. A Vaidya doctor.

THIRD. A logician.

FOURTH. An astrologer.

FIFTH. A linguist.

SIXTH. I am a baron.

OTHERS. I come from Shringeri.

I come from Tanjore.

I come from Rameshwar.

I come from Kumbhakonam.

I come from Banaras.

We're Poona people.

SUTRADHAR. Good Good Good!

*A Brahman from one side of the swaying human curtain of people stealthily tries to sneak off stage.*

SUTRADHAR. Ho! Ho! Ho! *Bhatji buwa!* Wait now, wait now.

Hold your horses! Must you go?

BRAHMAN. Forces? Whose forces? Foreign? English?

SUTRADHAR. Not forces! Hold your horses!

BRAHMAN. So I'm stopped. What do you have to say?

SUTRADHAR. Where is Your Honour going so late at night?

BRAHMAN. Nowhere, nowhere. It's all right.

SUTRADHAR. Where is nowhere?

BRAHMAN. Just near somewhere.

SUTRADHAR. Somewhere is near where?

BRAHMAN. Go away. Don't wait. It's getting late!

*Brahman starts to go.*

SUTRADHAR. *Bhatji buwa...*

BRAHMAN. The hell with you. You're making me late, late, late, late.

SUTRADHAR. Late for what?

BRAHMAN. Fool, you're in the way.

SUTRADHAR. Whose way?

BRAHMAN. My way.

SUTRADHAR. Where does your way go?

BRAHMAN. To the graveyard.

SUTRADHAR. Then I'm coming.

BRAHMAN. He says, 'I'm coming'. What for, to die?

You look better here. I say 'goodbye'.

I go. You stay. That's all. Call it a day.

*He begins to go.*

SUTRADHAR. *(goes through the line and comes in again as if he has caught him farther on).* *Bhatji maharaj!*

BRAHMAN. May you itch without cause! Idiot—what more?

SUTRADHAR. To the graveyard at such speed?

BRAHMAN. You'll never understand my need.

SUTRADHAR. What's in the graveyard?

BRAHMAN. Idiot—wood to burn the dead.

SUTRADHAR. I need wood for my stove. I'll go ahead.

BRAHMAN. Put your head in the stove! *(Begins to go.)*

SUTRADHAR. *(Comes in front of him.)* What else is there?

BRAHMAN. Spirits, smoke, genies and air!

SUTRADHAR. I'll come there. I need four genies to fill a bottle!

BRAHMAN. Stuff yourself in it and your brother and your old man! I'll put a curse on you—believe me—I can!

*Begins to go.*

SUTRADHAR. Ho! Ho! *Bhatji buwa, Bhatji buwa.*

BRAHMAN. Now, son of a bitch, what do you want?

SUTRADHAR. I need a fourth genie. Will you come? In the bottle? No, no, not in a bottle! In Bavannakhani? Where the girls are? Dancing? Singing?

BRAHMAN. What! How did you know? Just you wait! I'll slap your face. I'll get you!

*A chase. In and out of the Brahman line. The line begins to sway: 'Shri Ganaraya' begins. Brahman disappears behind Brahman curtain. From the side of the line, a portly Brahman hurriedly goes out. Sutradhar is in his way. They collide.*

BRAHMAN. Oy Oy. You son of a bitch. Don't you have eyes and ears?

SUTRADHAR. I'm sorry, O priestly Brahman.

BRAHMAN. Don't you have any manners?

SUTRADHAR. I'm so sorry, O lordly Brahman.

BRAHMAN. Don't you have any brains?

SUTRADHAR. I'm very sorry, O honoured Brahman.

BRAHMAN. You bumped into me, you son of a bastard.

SUTRADHAR. I touch your feet, O Brahman.  
 BRAHMAN. Oh you monkey! Is this the Peshwai or the Mughal Kingdom? Bumps into a holy Brahman!  
 SUTRADHAR. But not a Brahman's wife!  
 BRAHMAN. Enough! Enough! Then I would have you riding backward on a donkey with *sindur* all over your head!  
 SUTRADHAR. But there is no donkey.  
 BRAHMAN. No donkey? No donkey in the Peshwa's Kingdom? What do you think the Peshwai is? If the Peshwa wanted, he could have one thousand donkeys all lined up in the city of Poona.  
 SUTRADHAR. (*gesturing towards the line*). All lined up! But O Brahman, where are you going?  
 BRAHMAN. Why do you ask?  
 SUTRADHAR. Because.  
 BRAHMAN. One does not ask where another is going. It's a bad omen.  
 SUTRADHAR. I'm sorry, O Brahman. Can one ask another where he is coming from?  
 BRAHMAN. He may.  
 SUTRADHAR. Then are you coming from your home?  
 BRAHMAN. And going to Bavannakhani! (*He bites his tongue.*) (*Aside*) Oh Oh Oh, I shouldn't have told him. Confound it! I'm going...I'm going...I have to go to the temple. I'm late. *Goes behind the line in a hurry. The curtain of men sings 'Shri Ganaraya' and sways. Now two or three handsome Brahmins come hurriedly in front of the curtain.*  
 SUTRADHAR. Aho, gentlemen! Moneyed men! Mansioned men! Carriaged and horsed men! Where are you going?  
 THE THREE (*together*). To the temple.  
 SUTRADHAR. Wah! Wah! What's in the temple at this hour?

THE THREE. Kirtan. Sermon.  
 SUTRADHAR. Sermon on what?  
 THE THREE (*together*). Temptation. That's the plot. Vishvamitra and Menaka. Yes, that's it.  
 SUTRADHAR. What man is giving the sermon?  
 THE THREE. Not a man, a woman. (*All three bite their tongues.*)  
 SUTRADHAR. A woman? Since when have women been doing kirtan?  
 THE THREE (*confused*). Not a kirtan, a dance.  
 SUTRADHAR. A dance! Since when did a dance need a topic?  
 THE THREE. Not a topic, a *lavani*—a love song.  
 SUTRADHAR. Since when was the temptation of Vishvamitra by Menaka in a *lavani*?  
 THE THREE (*confused*). Not Vishvamitra and Menaka. Raghu and Myna, the love birds.  
 SUTRADHAR. And since when did they start singing love songs in the temple?  
 THE THREE. Not a temple! In Bavannakhani! You're a fine one! You got it out of us. That's enough. Let's go.  
*One by one the Brahmins of the curtain start to go out quickly. The human curtain dissolves. We now see their backs as individuals.*  
 SUTRADHAR. (*to the beat of the dholki drum*).  
 Night comes.  
 Poona Brahmins go  
 To Bavannakhani.  
 They go  
 To Bavannakhani.  
 They go the cemetery.  
 They go to the kirtan.  
 They go to the temple—as they have done every day.

The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani.  
*The Brahmans make a curtain with backs towards audience.*  
*The curtain sings and sways.*

Ram Shiva Hari

Mukunda Murari

Radhakrishna Hari

The street of Bavanna became for a while

The garden of Krishna.

*Sutradhar plays the mridanga-drum to accompany this.*

SUTRADHAR. *(as the singing is going on at the back).*

The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani

And the Brahman wives stay at home.

They stay at home.

Oh! they stay at home.

They wait.

They cannot sleep.

Do you know what's happening in Bavannakhani in the house  
 of Gulabi, Gulabi the courtesan?

THE BRAHMAN CURTAIN. It's like Mathura.

Ho! Bavannakhani!

Ho! Bavannakhani!

It's like Mathura.

*The Brahman curtain is transformed into a group sitting in  
 Gulabi's hall in Bavannakhani. A dancer dances. The dance  
 is erotic. Ghashiram is dancing with her. He is her foil.  
 Sycophant. Ludicrous. All are involved in the erotic mood,  
 attentive to her. They hum:*

BRAHMANS. It's like Mathura.

Bavannakhani...

*After the dance, they whistle and throw turbans in the air.*

We want the Brahman/Brahman-wife dance...

*Gulabi and Ghashiram bow, go to one side, and reappear as  
 Brahman and Brahman-wife. Big stomach and long tuft of  
 hair. They sing lavani and dance. The Brahmans drool. Peals  
 of laughter. Then voices become inaudible.*

SUTRADHAR. Night comes, night comes.

The gun of eleven booms.

Two watches of the night are gone.

*Brahmans at Gulabi's stand with backs towards audience,  
 swaying and humming 'Bavannakhani...Mathura avatarli'.*

SUTRADHAR. The Brahmans have lost themselves in  
 Bavannakhani and the Brahman women are at home; they  
 stay at home; oh yes, they stay at home. The Brahmans have  
 lost themselves in the cemetery, in kirtan; the Brahman  
 women are sentenced to solitary confinement.

*'Radhakrishna Hari, Govinda Murali'—in front of the cur-  
 tain of Brahmans humming this comes a Brahman woman  
 with a saucy air. She waits. A sardar (Maratha landowner)  
 comes in a Maratha turban. He knocks at an imaginary door.  
 She opens the door. He goes in. They embrace, and go further  
 inside.*

SUTRADHAR *(beating the mridanga-drum)*. Here a Brahman  
 woman in solitary confinement; there the crowds waiting for  
 a glimpse of Gulabi...

BRAHMAN line *(humming)*. Bavannakhani!

Mathura avatarli

Ho! Bavannakhani...

*The line splits to let us see the Brahman/Brahman-wife dance  
 we saw before.*

SUTRADHAR. The night progresses

The night progresses

The night progresses

And the Peshwa's Chief Minister,

Nana of the nine courts,  
Nana of the wealth and power,  
Nana Phadnavis

To Gulabi's place proceeds.

*The curtain turns towards us. Sways. Splits. Nana comes through the opening to a tabla rhythm.*

*Loud chant:*

Bavannakhani

Mathura avatarli

Ho, Bavannakhani...

*Nana: silver-handled walking stick. Garland of flowers on wrist. Dancer comes dancing from back of line. Both dance. Ghashiram stands to one side, in Brahman dress.*

ALL TOGETHER. Radhakrishna Hari

Govinda Murali

Ramashiva Hari

Mukunda Murari...

*The dance goes on. The gathered Brahmans dance. Ghashiram also. The dance moves to the back. Brahman ladies and their maratha lovers dance in front. Both dances are on the stage of the same time. Brahman lady and her lover dance off.*

NANA (*grabs one foot while dancing*). Oy oy oy oy oy oy oy oy.

*Confusion. Dance goes off beat. 'Radhakrishna Hari Mukunda Murari'—Nana dances in the middle, holding one foot.*

SUTRADHAR. What happened in the midst of the dance?

The great man, Nana, hurt his ankle.

The pain began to throb, to rankle.

*The dance goes faster. Tune: Mukunda Murari. Ghashiram in Brahman dress looks at Nana's hobbling and bends to the*

*injured leg, making Nana put it on his back. Nana feels better. All look on in surprise. All gesticulate...*

SUTRADHAR. (*gesturing in enquiry around him*).

What happened?

How did it happen?

Did he fall?

Tumble down?

Slip down?

Trip down?

Did he put his foot wrong?

ALL (*to Nana*). Your Highness. What happened?

NANA (*balancing on his stick with one foot on Ghashiram's back*).

Nothing. Sprained my ankle a little bit. Oh!

(*Notices Ghashiram and lifts his foot with difficulty*.)

Who's this?

(*Ghashiram sits back with the foot in his hand*.)

Looks like a Poona scholar.

(*All watch*.)

Get up, Bhatji. We are pleased with you.

(*Takes off his pearl necklace and holds it out*.)

Bhatji, take this reward.

(*Ghashiram does not take it*.)

Bhatji—a reward—

GHASHIRAM. Your Highness, I have been rewarded.

(*Gestures towards the slippered foot he holds in his hands*.)

In my hands has fallen—grace!

All here envy me my place.

This is a gift to last me all my days.

*Sits in great deference.*

NANA (*very pleased*). Wah! Wah! What words! What ready wit! What sweetness in his speech! Rise.

You look as if you came from the North.

GHASHIRAM. Ji! (*Stands.*)

NANA. Your name?

GHASHIRAM. Ghashiram Savaldas. (*Takes off his wig with the long tuft of hair in the style of Poona Brahmans.*)

NANA. It seems you are a Brahmans from Kanauj.

GULABI (*coming forward with a coquettish air*). He came four days ago. He dances with me. He was a foreigner, going without food. I said: let him stay here. He washes my utensils. Sings for me. Does all sorts of things.

NANA (*pats her cheek*). Thik. Thik. (*Claps for a servant.*) Bring my palanquin.

ALL SING (*as the palanquin is brought in*). It is brought.

*Nana goes hobbling into the palanquin formed by the Brahmans.*

ALL SING. Nine Court Nana sits in the palanquin. He goes.

NANA (*as if speaking from the palanquin*). What is your name again? Ghashiram. Here!

*Takes off necklace and throws it. Ghashiram deftly catches it. Nana departs in the palanquin.*

ALL Nana goes...

SUTRADHAR. Nana goes. The Brahmans stay. No restrictions now.

No reverence now. No modesty now. No protocol now. None at all. None at all. None at all.

*Three or four try to play with Gulabi. She erotically keeps them all at a distance. Her hair, sari become dishevelled.*

CHORUS. Radhakrishna Hari. Mukunda Murari.

*Ghashiram caresses the necklace with great joy.*

SUTRADHAR. Night is over...

The sky lightens.

Dawn comes to Poona.

*Classical raga Bhupali to rhythm. Gulabi goes inside. From one wing Brahmans, from another Marathas—cross as if going home. Sleepy faces. Yawning and stretching. Turbans on, any which way. Crossing, the two lines turn and look at each other.*

*Ghashiram begins to go with necklace; Gulabi comes out and blocks his way. Binding the end of her sari around her waist, she demands the necklace. He does not give it to her. Harshly: 'Give me that necklace'. He won't.*

GHASHIRAM. This is mine. Nanasahib gave it to me. It is mine.

GULABI. I hired you as a dancer. That's why you could get as much as a glimpse of Nana's shoes. I should have that necklace.

*Bangs her foot on the floor. Gestures for someone. Two or three come in, rolling up their sleeves. To the rhythm of the mridanga: Ghashiram: 'This is mine. It's mine'. Clutches the necklace. Is beaten. The thugs take the necklace, throw Ghashiram to the front of the stage. He gets up after a while. Dusts his sleeve. Wipes blood off his face. Air of humiliation. To the beat of the drum, the palanquin of a white man comes on the stage. Two Brahman walk alongside and talk to the Sahib. In front a Brahmans with ash on his forehead, shouts: 'The Sahib is coming. Step aside'. A Brahman makes way for the palanquin.*

BRAHMAN. Get aside, you dog. Can't you see the Sahib is coming? You shapeless piece of shit! Sleeping on the street! (*Turns to the Sahib.*) The natives of this country have lost all their manners nowadays, sir. I swear, no one has any self-respect or pride. Come on, come on, sir. Now you'll get to see the ceremony of the giving of royal gifts to the Brah-

mans, from the inside. I'll sneak you in. Only three silver rupees, sir.

ANOTHER BRAHMANS. Go away, Rambhata. Give me two! Let's go, sir, I'll get you in.

THIRD BRAHMAN. Give me just one rupee! Come on, come on. *(To the others)* Misbegotten bastards! Shut up!

SECOND BRAHMAN *(to the first)*. Who asked you to butt in, you graveyard stink!

FIRST BRAHMANS. Both of them are shysters, sir. Come with me. The ceremony today is in the Brahman's honour. There's a feast. They give out money. Come on. Come on.

*The palanquin of the white man with the Brahman running behind moves off. Other Brahmans in groups, talking, hurrying, follow them.*

SUTRADHAR. All the Brahmans go, all the Brahmans go once more to the great dakshina ceremony in the park at the foot of the holy hill of Parvati. Now the Peshwa will honour the Brahmans. There'll be a great feast...The Brahmans have started to fight. They're gulping down the food. They're laden with gifts.

*Ghashiram stares with hungry eyes. The Brahmans who had gone in come out and stand in line again. Soldiers try again and again to keep the line straight. Ghashiram stands to one side. He looks hungry. Soldiers accost him.*

FIRST SOLDIER. Hey, who are you?

GHASHIRAM. I am Ghashiram Savaldas from Kanauj.

SECOND SOLDIER. Go on, move aside. Why are you here?

GHASHIRAM. They're honouring Brahmans. There's a feast.

FIRST SOLDIER. What does that have to do with you?

GHASHIRAM. I'm a Brahman too.

SECOND SOLDIER. You a Brahman!

Where is your shaven head?

Where is your holy thread?

Where is your pious look?

FIRST SOLDIER. Where is your holy book?

Recite the hierarchy of caste!

Tell us, when did you last fast!

SECOND SOLDIER. Looks like a thief?

FIRST SOLDIER. Looks like a scoundrel!

GHASHIRAM. No. I'm a Brahman. From Kanauj. New to Poona—

*Coming back from the ceremony, a Brahman pats the pocket of his shirt and suddenly yells: 'Thief, thief. My pocket's been picked. My prize money's gone. It's gone. I'm lost, I'm dead. I'm drowned'. Hubbub on the stage. Ghashiram is beaten. Soldiers drag Ghashiram, fighting, off the stage. Ghashiram yells: 'Let me see Nanasahib! Take me to Nanasahib!' The Sahib comes from the festival and watches.*

SAHIB. What happened? Why are you beating that man?

BRAHMAN. It wasn't a man, sir, it was a thief. That corpse stole my prize money! May maggots eat his hand. May the hand of that bastard fall off...

SAHIB. The thief was someone else. I saw it. He was behind you at the ceremony and ran away with your money. Poor fellow! Ah well, take this. *(He gives him coins.)*

BRAHMAN. Thank you. Thank you, *huzur* *(in Indian English accent)*.

*Goes off happy. The Sahib goes. Several hungry-looking Brahmans go running after the Sahib.*

*Now the Brahmans in the line turn their backs towards the audience and sing: 'Shri Ganaraya...*

*Shri Ganaraya...*

*Shri Ganaraya dances, dances...'*



*Soldiers drag in Ghashiram, covered with blood.*

FIRST SOLDIER. Lie down in this cell, you bum.

SECOND SOLDIER. Be quiet or you'll be bound hand and foot.  
Maybe I should kick you in the balls. You'll wiggle like a  
butchered goat. (*Both go.*)

SUTRADHAR. (*as if he were a fellow prisoner coming to  
Ghashiram*). What's going on? What happened?

GHASHIRAM (*moaning*). I might have died. I'm just barely alive.

SUTRADHAR. What brought you here?

GHASHIRAM. Fortune. Came to find my fortune. Wife came too  
and my dear daughter; because of them, God stopped the  
slaughter. But I'm not a thief.

SUTRADHAR. Maybe you are,

Maybe you're not.

In this place

In matters not a jot.

In this damned spot

We're in the same pot.

I'm a thief

You're a thief.

Lie down easy,

Save yourself grief.

The bed's of stone.

Rest easy, don't moan.

The bloody body rests well on cold stone. I speak from  
experience.

GHASHIRAM. How did you get here?

SUTRADHAR. Just the opposite of what you said. You say you  
didn't do it. I say I did do it. Just a difference of a negative.  
Otherwise it's all the same.

I'm a thief.

You're a thief.

Our only hope is

The mercy of the police.

Your theft

is their bribe.

If their mercy ends

we end

so we bend.

GHASHIRAM. But I didn't steal. I swear to God I didn't. I'm not  
a thief. I'm from Kanauj. I'm a Brahman. I've been here two  
weeks. I came here to find my fortune—and lost my repu-  
tation. How did it happen? What will happen to my wife? To  
my daughter? What will they say when they hear of this?

SUTRADHAR. They'll say whatever they want to say.

GHASHIRAM. That's right. Won't they say that I've become a  
thief? Enough. Well, I'll be one. I'll be a thief.

SUTRADHAR. If the police let you!

Friend, the thief is dependent on the police.

If not—they'll soften your bones.

Sometimes they break your bones.

Sometimes they crack your bones.

Sometimes you lose your life.

The thief earns what he thieves.

It's easy income for the police.

It's a partnership.

The thief is a simple thief.

The police are official thieves.

If a thief wants to live

To the police he's got to give.

You need protection money

And on top of that

Their mercy might end any time

And so will you.  
 You'll get kicks and blows,  
 You'll see the cell.  
 No one will know your address, Baba.  
 That's how the play will end one day.  
 No one will weep.  
 No one will remember you, Baba.  
 That's how the play will end one day.  
 No one will remember you, Baba,  
 What's the use?  
 One petty thief less in a world of big thieves.  
 So, little servant,  
 Go to the feet of God.

*A Hindi devotional song with the mridanga-drum begins. The Brahman line, with no turbans, hands to ears, do accompaniments. End of Kawali, all turn backs. Soldier enters. Throws Ghashiram out in audience with force. On stage: Brahmans, Brahman women, Gulabi, the Maratha lovers, etc., all stand and look down on Ghashiram.*

SOLDIER. Get lost. Hey! Thief, monkey. If you so much as put a foot in the holy city of Poona, you'll lose your head. Go away. Take your ugly face far away. Don't come back to Poona. Not even your shadow should fall on the city of Poona. Get lost. Go.

*Soldier wipes his hands. Those on stage, go. In the audience, the tormented Ghashiram.*

GHASHIRAM (*takes off his sash, throws it on the ground*). But I'll come back. I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone! I am a Kanauj Brahman, but I've become a Shudra, a criminal, a useless animal. There is no one to stop me now, to mock me, to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I am a devil.

You've made me an animal; I'll be a devil inside. I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. Then I'll be Ghashiram again, the son of Savaldas once more.

*The mridanga starts a forceful beat. Ghashiram dances to that beat, a war dance, banging his fist in the dust. He storms out through the audience. On the stage, the Brahmans again sing: 'Ganapati dances; we are Poona Brahmans', swaying slowly. Ganapati comes in, sits with folded legs in the middle. Two Brahmans form a human God House around him. Drum and shehnai sound.*

SUTRADHAR. (*he throws a cloth over his shoulder like a kirtankar, a teller of sacred stories*).

Whereas in the realm of time we bow today before Shri Ganesh...

*Audience cannot hear the rest in the din of drum and shehnai, but we can see his gestures. He is telling a religious tale. All the people on the stage, except a few, become the audience for the story. Four stand as accompanists for the kirtan. Some Brahman women enter and sit in the stage audience. Nana Phadnavis comes in, dancing a little. He holds a flower, all rise. Nana gestures: Sit down. Sit down. The music stops. Nana sits on a high seat. All are below him. Nana ogles the women. Smells the flower. Does not pay attention to the kirtan. The Sutradhar as a Haridasa—a special kind of religious story-teller-singer—sings an abhanga. Nana leers at the women. They are uneasy. Some adjust their saris. No noise now; just gestures.*

*The abhanga changes to a lavani—a change from a religious song to a love ballad. The Haridasa sings a lavani. Suddenly an abhanga. Back to lavani. Nana in lavani state of mind. The last of the sermon—repetition of God's names—comes*

*loudly. Nana looks unblinkingly at a pretty girl. She is beautiful, shy, innocent. Everyone falls at the feet of the Haridasa. Nana walks towards the girl. The girl goes to bow at the Haridasa's feet. Falls at his feet. Nana steps towards her like a cat. All go but the girl stays behind, prays before Ganapati. Nana gestures to the servant to close the door. The Sutradhar who played the Haridasa role comes forward from the scene.*

NANA (*voice of lust*). Child, what do you want?

(*She turns around, startled.*)

All your dreams this Nana will fulfil.

(*He puts a hand, on her shoulder. She pulls back.*)

Oh, don't be shy. This is our house. This is a private hall. No one will see. No one in Poona today has the audacity to watch the great Nana Phadnavis!

GIRL. He will see.

NANA. He will see? Who?

GIRL (*points at Ganapati*). He.

NANA. The idol of holiness? That all holy Ganapati? The maker of Good? Look, he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side. If you sit on our lap, he won't say anything!

GIRL. You are like my father!

NANA. Only in age. But our devotion is—only to this graceful image . . . Don't lose any more time. Youth will not come again; the bloom will not last. (*He comes close and tries to put an arm around her.*) My dear, you are like a daughter to us—someone else's.

GIRL (*pulling back*). I'm afraid.

NANA. Afraid? But we feel only love, my dear. Oh ho ho, such shyness, such shyness.

*Tries to grab her. She pulls away. Nana is totally drawn to her. He chases her. She runs like a frightened deer. She es-*

*capas him. Nana in blind lust grabs the servant at the door. This is Ghashiram in servant's dress. The lower part of his face is covered with the end of his turban.*

NANA (*eyes shut*). Oh ho ho! Oh ho ho!

SERVANT. Sir, I am a man. The woman has run away.

NANA (*disappointed, opens his eyes, becomes furious*). Damn you. We'll have you killed. (*Claps for his attendants.*)

SERVANT. By Your Majesty's orders, there's no one else in the hall. This servant is on guard.

NANA. Lumphead! Dolt! (*Rubs his hands together.*)

SERVANT. This servant is sorry, Majesty.

NANA. Sorry! You've ruined it all! It was so close! Why did you interfere? Speak!

SERVANT. Your Majesty grabbed me!

NANA. How could we know? We had it in our hands—then the prey fled.

SERVANT. You'll get her back.

NANA. How—after this!

SERVANT. If the hunter is ready, the prey will be found.

NANA. But not that one!

SERVANT. Even she will be found; that very one will be found.

NANA. Oh, can we? Can we find her? How beautifully formed!

What a lovely figure! Did you see? Erect! Young! Tender!

Ah! Ho ho! We've seen so many, handled so many, but none like that one. None her equal. We wonder who she is.

SERVANT. Whoever she is, if the order is given, this servant will bring her.

NANA. Would you? We'll be grateful. We will give more than enough in return. But—when?

SERVANT. Tomorrow. Or the day after. Or the day after that.

NANA. Maybe tonight, eh!

SERVANT. Majesty, I will try, but it's uncertain. Don't wait. You may be disappointed.

NANA. We can't bear the idea of waiting. Precious, precious thing!

SERVANT. If one keeps one's head, one can in time wear fifty hats!

NANA. If she is not found, no one will keep his head! Our grandeur's gone if she's not had. We tell you, if she is found, then this Nine Court Nana will conquer Hindustan! What a bosom! Buds just blossoming... We'll squeeze them like this!

SERVANT (*bites his lips but acts with humility*). Put your sword back in its sheath, Majesty. The prey is far away.

NANA. Is tomorrow a certainty?

SERVANT. I'll try.

NANA (*taking the ring from his finger*). Take this. Keep it. It's a diamond and there's more if you get her. Don't worry about anything else.

SERVANT. Ji!

*Mangalamurti morya-singing Ganapati immersion procession comes on stage. Group plays lezim, throws red powder; horse and elephant-masked participants, one like a fierce demon, etc. Nana, Ghashiram and Ganapati are hidden by the procession, which lingers for a little while, then goes off stage. Some come back as chorus.*

SUTRADHAR. (*takes off the Haridasa shawl*).

Ganapati goes to his home—to his home—to his home.

Whatever Nine Court Nana says—the Peshwai obeys.

Fear of Nana grows day by day—day by day.

Even his enemies say

There's only one Nana

The rest are na-na-na-na.

(*Brahmans standing in a line behind sing:*)

There's only one Nana

The rest are na-na-na.

Radhakrishna Hari Ho! Govinda Murali

Ram Shiva Hari Ho! Mukunda Murari...

*The chant continues. Nana comes in dancing to this rhythm.*

*The young girl comes in, ready to dance. She moves to the rhythm, makes sensuous gestures, moves around Nana elusively, driving him berserk. She doesn't touch him. Every now and then, Ghashiram is seen. Nana throws him favours and dances behind the girl. Brahmans sing to the rhythm of drum and cymbals. Turning their backs to the audience, the Brahmans form a garden. Nana chases the girl through the garden.*

The garden of Hira

The garden of Saras

The garden of Moti

The gardens of Poona

Become the gardens of Mathura

Where Krishna played.

*The beat becomes stronger and faster. In the end, Nana throws his silver-knobbed walking stick to Ghashiram and disappears with the girl. Ghashiram catches it, biting his lips, bends it. Nana and the girl reappear and dance like Radha and Krishna. Seven or eight women of different ages, all Nana's wives, make a dancing circle around them, Ghashiram walks into the audience, looks at the scene on the stage and laughs viciously.*

GHASHIRAM (*suddenly cries out loud*). Now he's in my hands...Oh, my daughter...The beast...(Then yells at the audience.) Oh, you people. Look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf! Look. Look at this father. Putting the child of his heart up for sale. Look at my innocent

daughter—a whore. That old overripe bastard! Look at him, eating her like a peach...Spit on me. Stone me. Look, look, but I will not quit. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. *The Brahmans' song and the dance of Nana and the girl go on. Going out of the audience, Ghashiram cries: 'Look, look at this tamasha. Look, look at this travesty. Applaud. Clap. Applaud.' The dancers leave the stage. The Brahman garden becomes the chorus.*

SUTRADHAR. Nine Court Nana only thought of Gauri.

ALL. Thought of nothing else.

SUTRADHAR. Nine Court Nana only dreamed of Gauri.

ALL. Dreamed of nothing else.

SUTRADHAR. Nothing but Gauri for Nana.

ALL. No one but Gauri for Nana.

SUTRADHAR. Couldn't think about his home.

ALL. Couldn't think about his people.

SUTRADHAR. Couldn't think about his work.

ALL. Couldn't think about his God.

SUTRADHAR. Wouldn't do without Gauri.

ALL. Not a clue without Gauri.

SUTRADHAR. For Nana no labour, just lust.

ALL. Lust knows no age, no shame.

SUTRADHAR. Pundalik varada Gauri Viththal!

ALL. Gauri Viththal, Ghashiram Tukaram.

*All step back, turn their backs. Nana enters. Helpless. Ghashiram comes.*

NANA. Just one more time, Ghashiram. Just one more time, you bastard.

GHASHIRAM. It will not do, Majesty. This is too much. The waters have come up to my chin. Better that we stop before the water rises over my head. Otherwise I will be humiliated

all over Poona. What will people say about me? About you, Majesty? Your Majesty goes around in a palanquin. Ghashiram walks on the street among the people. That won't do. I cannot do any more. Now that's all. I was carried away by my love of your Majesty. If the Peshwa hears about this, my hundred years will be over. Whatever has happened has happened, has flowed into the Ganga. My daughter will not come again to Your Highness house. Now I'll get her married. Now I'll search for a bridegroom.

NANA. But—a few more days...After that, we ourselves will see that she is married well to one of our men.

GHASHIRAM. No.

NANA. Ghashya, you know the price of disobedience.

GHASHIRAM. This servant is ready, Highness. That humiliation can be borne, but no more of the other. Think about the mother of the girl. After all, it's her own child, nurtured from the womb, the breast...

NANA. We'll feel that way about her too, after a few days, Ghashiram. Tell your wife, tell her we'll take on all of Gauri's worries. We'll think of her children as our own!

GHASHIRAM. It won't do, Highness.

NANA. Don't say no, you outcaste! Don't you have a heart?

GHASHIRAM. The heart that gives a daughter to your whims and fancies, Highness.

NANA. Remember who you are arguing with!

GHASHIRAM. I remember. Please allow your servant to leave.

NANA. I'll have her caught and brought to the palace.

GHASHIRAM. The Peshwa is still alive, Highness.

NANA. Then what can I do?

GHASHIRAM. Sir, there is a way. People will not talk, my daughter will not be humiliated openly in Poona—if you make a clear arrangement.

NANA. How?

GHASHIRAM. People's mouths must be closed.

NANA. All right, but how?

GHASHIRAM. If I give you an answer, will you accept it? No excuses?

NANA. Tell me. But first let me meet her.

GHASHIRAM. All right, Sir, to shut people's mouths, make me the Kotwal of Poona.

NANA (*jolted*). What! Kotwal! But the Kotwal guards the whole city of Poona.

GHASHIRAM. If you don't agree, forget it. I'm not itching for it.

NANA. Oh, but it will be very hard to do.

GHASHIRAM. What's hard for Nana? In Poona the sun rises whenever Nana tells it to.

NANA. Suggest something else.

GHASHIRAM. This is the only way. Otherwise the lovely Gauri will not come to this palace again.

NANA. No! Send her. I'll make you Kotwal. When will you send her?

GHASHIRAM. After I have the order, signed and sealed, in my hand!

NANA. Bastard. You've got me in a narrow pass.

GHASHIRAM. Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter. Suddenly he looks murderous.

NANA (*frightened*). Ghashi...

GHASHIRAM (*suddenly calm*). Give me the order.

*A servant brings the order to be signed. Nana signs it indifferently. He hands it to Ghashiram.*

NANA. Go. Send her quickly. (*Ghashiram folds the paper neatly, bows and leaves.*)

NANA (*suddenly brightening*). Go, Ghashya, old bastard. We made you. We made you Kotwal. Raise hell if you wish. But

you don't know the ways of this Nana. This time, there are two bullets in this gun. With the first one, we'll fell your luscious daughter. But with the second we will make the city of Poona dance. Ghashya, child, you're a foreigner. I have put you on Poona's back. Why? As a countercheck to all those conspirators. You'll not be able to join them; they'll never trust you even if you do. Because you're a stranger, you're an outsider. We just raised a dog at our door to the position of the Kotwali! We are your sole support. Oh, you're a bastard, Ghashya. Your manner will be more arrogant than that of the Chitpavan Brahmans. You'll manage the deference nicely. You'll create a court—and a half! No worry about that. What'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do it; our Kotwal pays for it. (*He claps his hands.*) The opportunity comes in the shape of Ghashiram. And that luscious peach is at hand to be devoured by Nana. Excellent! Yes, Ghashya, be Kotwal. This Nana blesses you. (*Turns around. Drummer comes on stage.*)

DRUMMER. Listen, listen. Ghashiram Savaldas has been decreed Kotwal of Poona.

*Nana disappears in the mob of Brahmans that comes forward talking loudly. The din grows louder and louder. Suddenly it stops. Trumpets. Horns. All on the stage bow and straighten up. Some people enter, walking backward, gesturing in deference, hand towards forehead. Behind them—Ghashiram, wearing the glittering clothes of the Kotwal. On his head an elegant turban. Arrogance in his step. Seems different, larger than life. Trumpets and horns sound.*

**ACT TWO**

*As at the beginning, twelve people stand, playing cymbals. Sutradhar comes in. After a few lines of the Shri Ganaraya song, they keep repeating the first two lines.*

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram became Kotwal of Poona.

OTHERS. Kotwal of Poona.

SUTRADHAR. His work goes on, his work goes on, his work goes on.

OTHERS. Goes on.

SUTRADHAR. Gauri orders, Nana does, Ghashiram's reign is here.

OTHERS. His reign is here.

SUTRADHAR. Gauri dances, Nana dances, Ghashiram's got his chances.

OTHERS. His chances.

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram kotwal gave an order.

OTHERS. Gave an order.

SUTRADHAR. All the old orders will be implemented strictly.

OTHERS. Implemented strictly.

SUTRADHAR. No whoring without a permit.

OTHERS. Without a permit.

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram Kotwal gave an order.

OTHERS. Gave an order.

SUTRADHAR. No cremation without a permit.

OTHERS. Without a permit.

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram Kotwal says to eat with a lower caste person is a crime.

OTHERS. Is a crime.

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram Kotwal says to kill a pig, to do an abortion, to be a pimp, to commit a misdemeanour, to steal, to live with one's divorced wife, to remarry if one's husband

is alive, to hide one's caste, to use counterfeit coins, to commit suicide, without a permit, is a sin. A good woman may not prostitute herself, a Brahman may not sin, without a permit.

OTHERS. Do no wrong, without a permit.

SUTRADHAR. Whoever does wrong will be punished severely, with no mercy.

OTHERS (*humming*). Will not be pitied, with no mercy.

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram Kotwal started making the rounds of Poona at night, after the eleven o'clock cannon. Started ruling in person. Accosted anyone he met in the streets. Whipped people. Arrested people. Demanded people's permits. Imprisoned people. Sued people.

OTHERS. He sued people.

SUTRADHAR. The prisons started filling.

OTHERS. Started filling.

SUTRADHAR. Gauri orders, Nana does, Ghashiram rules.

OTHERS. Ghashiram rules.

SUTRADHAR. All of Poona loses heart.

OTHERS. Loses heart...oh! Loses heart.

SUTRADHAR. At night they have to stay at home.

OTHERS. Stay at home...oh! Stay at home.

SUTRADHAR. They have to stay with the wives they married.

OTHERS. The wives they married.

SUTRADHAR. They have to sleep with the men they are married to.

OTHERS. The men they married.

SUTRADHAR. They are compelled to be moral, not to abort, to be wholesome, to stay alive.

OTHERS. They are compelled...oh! They are compelled.

SUTRADHAR. Prostitutes' Lane was desolate.

The chasing of women was halted.  
 Pimps turned into beggars.  
 Counterfeit coins were worthless.

OTHERS. Sin was worthless.

SUTRADHAR. Gauri dances, Nana dances, Ghashiram's reign has come.

OTHERS. Has come.

SUTRADHAR. Without a permit, nothing can be done.

OTHERS. Nothing means nothing!

*Ghashiram enters accompanied by two lamp bearers and two patrolmen. The police call out the time of night. The twelve Brahmans stand with their backs to the audience. The Sutradhar tries to escape.*

GHASHIRAM (*grabbing his neck, laughing*). Idiot! It's a good thing I caught you. Where are you going?

SUTRADHAR. Nowhere, my lord.

GHASHIRAM. To steal?

SUTRADHAR. No, sir.

GHASHIRAM. To whore?

SUTRADHAR. No, no, sir.

GHASHIRAM (*slaps his face*). Tell the truth.

SUTRADHAR. No, no sir.

GHASHIRAM. Then where?

SUTRADHAR. Home.

GHASHIRAM. Whose home? (*Hits him.*) Tell the truth. Which whore were you going to?

SUTRADHAR. No, sir, to my own house.

GHASHIRAM. Then why are you out this late? (*Kicks him.*) Speak quickly.

SUTRADHAR. Sir, I was going to fetch the midwife.

GHASHIRAM. Midwife. Who's delivering?

SUTRADHAR. My wife.

GHASHIRAM. Why does she deliver in the middle of the night?

(*Slaps him.*) Speak up.

SUTRADHAR. Her time had come!

GHASHIRAM. Where is the midwife?

SUTRADHAR. She wouldn't come. Said she didn't have a permit.

Said she'd come after the four o'clock cannon.

GHASHIRAM. Good. Have you got a permit? Speak.

SUTRADHAR. No, sir.

GHASHIRAM. Why not? Go out on the road at night without a permit and you'll get whipped.

SUTRADHAR. Have pity, sir.

GHASHIRAM (*hits him*). Why didn't you get a permit?

SUTRADHAR. I didn't know she was going to deliver at night.

GHASHIRAM. What! You didn't know when you wife would deliver? She's your wife, isn't she?

SUTRADHAR. Yes, sir, don't hit me.

GHASHIRAM (*to a soldier*). Go with him. Go to his house and make sure. If he's lying, take off his shirt and give him twenty-five lashes. If he is a thief, an adulterer, a whore-monger, then tie up his hands and feet and throw him in a cell.

*Sutradhar and soldier go. The twelve men are still standing with their backs to the audience. GHASHIRAM stands twirling his moustache.*

GHASHIRAM. I'll straighten out this adulterous city in six months! (*Suddenly*) What's that noise? Again! Again! What are they doing in their homes at this hour of the night? (*Knocks on the back of the seventh Brahman as if he were a door.*) Open the door! (*That man turns around and 'comes out' rubbing his eyes.*)



SEVENTH MAN. What's this?

GHASHIRAM. What's going on inside?

SEVENTH MAN. I don't know.

GHASHIRAM (*grabs his arm*). Give it to me straight! Tell the truth! If you lie I'll cut out your tongue. What noise did I hear?

SEVENTH MAN. Nothing.

GHASHIRAM. Swear by God. We heard something with these ears!

SEVENTH MAN. But what are you asking about?

GHASHIRAM (*catches his hair*). Tell me or I'll tear your hair out.

SEVENTH MAN (*confused*). Nothing, something, really nothing, What noise would you hear in a family man's house? We were sleeping...woke up...and so...

GHASHIRAM. Who's inside?

SEVENTH MAN. My wife.

GHASHIRAM. Are you telling the truth?

SEVENTH MAN. Oath of Rama! She came back from her mother's house today.

GHASHIRAM (*to the second soldier*). Go in and look. If you see something funny, get it out here. (*To the seventh man*) You stay here. (*The soldier goes through the doorway of the line. Ghashiram fingers his moustache.*) All of them, to the last man, whoremongers, fuckers—I'll straighten them out. *Soldier comes outside bringing a respectable woman. She is dishevelled, comes whimpering, straightening out her clothing.*

SOLDIER. She was inside, sir.

GHASHIRAM (*looking her over*). You're the wife in this house, are you? (*Woman bites her lip and nods with her head bent.*) Show me your wedding necklace. (*She shows it.*) Is it fake or real? His or someone else's?

WIFE (*nervous*). His.

GHASHIRAM (*looking at seventh man and woman alternately and twirling his moustache*). I don't believe you. Do you have any evidence?

SEVENTH MAN. Evidence...?

GHASHIRAM (*to soldier*). Bang on his neighbour's door. Wake them.

*Soldier bangs on the back of the eighth man. He turns around, comes forward sleepy-eyes.*

EIGHTH MAN (*in a Kannada accent*). What is it? (*Soldiers knock on the backs of some others. Almost all turn around.*)

ALL. (*in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu*). What's happened? What's happened? (*The woman almost dies of embarrassment.*)

GHASHIRAM (*gesticulating*). This woman, she was found in his house. Is she his wife by marriage? If you don't tell the truth I'll break your bones! Is she? She isn't, is she?

*All shake their heads.*

GHASHIRAM (*happily*). That's better. How did I catch you liars? (*To police*) Tie them up and bring them to the station. I'll judge them tomorrow. They are immoral.

*Soldier shoves the couple ahead. The others return to their places as if going to their homes and stand with their backs to the audience.*

GHASHIRAM (*to the lamp bearers*). Your ears should be sharp like mine. If there's the slightest squeak, you must know something bad is going on: The Kotwali should be respected. Let's go. (*Ghashiram and all go. The eleven in the line turn around.*)

THE LINE. Such was Ghashiram kotwal's harshness.

Such was the trouble he brought.

Poona lost heart, Poona lost heart.

SUTRADHAR (*comes forward through line*). Poona—lost—heart.  
 OTHERS. But who will do what about it? Who can do what?  
 SUTRADHAR. Behind Ghashiram Kotwal is Nana's power. If you  
 lay a hand on Ghashiram, Nana will smash you. If you don't  
 then Ghashiram will get you anyway. Ghashiram Kotwal...

OTHERS. Big-headed.

Pig-headed.

Impossible.

There is no limit, no end.

SUTRADHAR. To his arrogance.

But what's the remedy?

SUTRADHAR. Come on—let's sing: Rama Shiva Hari.

Radhakrishna Hari.

Govinda Murali.

*The singing goes on. The line turn their backs and stand. During this song for the celebration of Rangapanchami, Nana and Gauri and Nana's wives dance, throw colours, laugh, make merry. A Rangapanchami lavani begins. The dancer Gulabi comes in and dances an erotic dance to the tune of the lavani. Nana, pleased, gives her a golden bangle from his wrist. Gauri is ecstatic. Nana too. In a corner down stage, a British officer in military dress stands watching all this. The people from the line who were standing with their backs to the audience come forward and hide this scene. The lavani continues a bit and then fades. In front of the human curtain, Ghashiram and his soldiers are walking the streets of Poona.*

GHASHIRAM. If anyone is seen throwing powder at anyone but his wife, bind his hands. Morality must be protected. Take away the Brahmans who are having too good a time! Just a little fun without any vulgarity is all right. Keep a sharp ear out. Keep a sharp eye out. Demand permits.

*Ghashiram and the police leave. The line of Brahmans which has divided the two scenes goes behind the Rangapanchami play. This scene with Nana and Gauri and the lavani goes on. A woman comes in running.*

WOMAN. Sir, listen to my complaint. My husband and his brothers have been arrested by the Kotwal's soldiers. My father-in-law died. They won't let them hold the funeral. The permit is real, but they call it counterfeit. Sir—the corpse has been lying in the cremation ground since morning. The dogs are gathering. Sir—please—give us justice. . .

NANA (*as if his fun has been spoiled*). Where are the guards? Take this woman away at once. Who let her in without a permit? Complaints and all that go to the Kotwal. Go. Don't let anyone in. (*Servants take the woman away. To the lavani dancer*) All right, go on, go on! O you're a sweetheart! Wah! Wah!

*Song and dance go on. The Brahman line comes dancing forward to the tune, in front of the other dance. Music fades as all go off but the line of Brahmans.*

SUTRADHAR. The days went by. The months slipped by. As they do every year, the Poona gentry, the Poona intellectuals, the pandits, the priests, the beggars, gather in the special gardens for the royal favours.

OTHERS. Gathered in the garden...

*Ghashiram comes forward through the line. In the name of discipline, he shoves and pulls and pats and straightens. He swears. Some Brahmans with contented faces since they have received money, cross the stage. One of them yells: 'Thief! Thief! I've been robbed . . . 'Confusion. Pandemonium. Ghashiram becomes alert. The Brahman behind the one yelling panics and runs.*

GHASHIRAM. Catch him. Catch the bastard. Get the son of a bitch. Don't let him get away. Get him!

*The guards and other Brahmans run after him, bring him back. He is frightened. He cowers.*

GHASHIRAM. Got you! You were born a Brahman and you steal? *(Slaps him.)* Misbegotten bastard!

BRAHMAN. No sir, no, oh! No, I didn't steal. I swear by Rama. I've never done that. I swear by the *tulasi*. *(He begs.)*

GHASHIRAM. Search him.

*(The other Brahmans search him, don't find anything.)*

He could have thrown it away! Search for it. Go. *(To the Brahman)* Wait a moment. I'll show you the other side of the universe today. Goddam piece of dung! Betrayer of Brahmanhood!

SOLDIER. Your Honour, we couldn't find any evidence.

GHASHIRAM. What? Couldn't find any? *(Twirls moustache.)* No matter. Hit his balls and you'll find it. Where could it go?

BRAHMAN *(crying)*. Your Honour, I'm not a thief, I'm not. *(Falls at his feet.)*

GHASHIRAM. Would that noble Brahman yell 'Thief' without any reason? Where is he? *(They all look for him.)*

SOLDIER. Your Honour, he's nowhere to be found.

GHASHIRAM. What? Nowhere? How can that be? Why would he yell 'Thief'?

BRAHMAN *(crying)*. Because he was trying to get me. I got four of his Shravana commissions—but is that a crime? They say he sleeps with a Mahar woman. He thinks I started that rumour. But I didn't do anything. I swear by Rama. He started a feud with me for no reason. Save me! *(He cries out.)*

GHASHIRAM *(twirling his moustache)*. Very well. Will you pass an-ordeal, Brahman? *(The Brahman is staggered.)* Are you

telling the truth? Let's see. Let's test you. *(Brahman trembles.)* Confess your wrongdoing, or undergo an ordeal. *(Claps for a guard.)* Throw him into the dungeon. Set up an ordeal for the first watch tomorrow. Go.

*They take the Brahman out. Ghashiram exits on the other side. The Brahman line chants 'Pundalika varda'. They turn their backs and stand. The Brahman comes in and sits down as if in a cell, puts his head between his knees.*

SUTRADHAR. Night comes.

OTHERS. *(faintly)*. Night comes.

SUTRADHAR. Midnight...after midnight...The Brahman can't sleep.

OTHERS. Can't sleep.

SUTRADHAR. The soldiers come! *(Soldiers enter. Mime according to the Sutradhar's line.)* The nails of the Brahman's right hand are pulled out. The fingers are washed with lemon juice and soap. All the lines and signs of his hand are noted. His hands are wrapped in a bag and the bag is sealed. The ordeal is prepared.

OTHERS *(quietly)*. Dnyanab...Tukaram...*(The soldiers go.)*

SUTRADHAR. The first watch comes.

OTHERS. It comes. *(One person imitates a cock crow. Then another. The dozing Brahman comes awake.)*

SUTRADHAR. The time of the ordeal is night.

Seven rangoli are drawn on the floor.

*(One from the Brahman line mimes it.)*

I bow before thee, O Agni.

*(One mimes fanning the fire.)*

The ironsmith comes. A steel ball is heated red hot.

*(One mimes turning the ball.)*

The ball is heated. The ball is heated.

It is so hot that if you drop a piece of grass on it, it will catch fire.

The seal on the bag is checked and the hands drawn out. Six leaves are placed on his hands.

Oil is rubbed on them.

Chirapatra leaves, Bhal leaves are tied to the Brahman's head.

OTHERS. Dnayanaba...Tukaram...

SUTRADHAR. His Honour the Kotwal has arrived.

*(Ghashiram comes in and stands.)*

SUTRADHAR. The Brahman makes his statement. Water from a Mahar house, water from a Mang house is brought. An oath is sworn on the water by the Brahman. The ordeal begins, it begins.

OTHERS. The ordeal begins.

*They begin to chant some mantras. The ironsmith mimes lifting out a red hot ball. He approaches the Brahman. The seriousness of the occasion should be felt. The Brahman's hands are brought forward. They are trembling.*

BRAHMAN *(suddenly bleating like a goat)*. No! No! My hands will burn.

GHASHIRAM *(twirls his moustache and laughs)*. Hold him tightly. Get hold of his hands. *(Soldiers do it.)* Now what? Did you tell the truth or not?

BRAHMAN. Yes. On the oath of the *tulasi*.

GHASHIRAM. Then why are you afraid? The true are never frightened. The ordeal shall be done.

BRAHMAN. No! Let me go! Mother! No!

GHASHIRAM. The ordeal shall be done. The ordeal shall be done. You heretic! Bring that hot ball over here. Hold his hands. Tightly. If he yells, don't let go. Let his hands burn. You should smell them burning. Smell them!

*Brahman yells. Mime of placing the ball forcibly in his hands. Brahman yells. Mime of the ball falling off. The Brahman falls to the ground and writhes in agony. Ghashiram watches, enjoying it all. He smooths his moustache.*

GHASHIRAM. Speak. Didn't you tell a lie?

BRAHMAN *(crying)*. No.

GHASHIRAM. You didn't tell a lie? Then why are the hands burnt? Didn't you tell a lie?

BRAHMAN. No. No.

GHASHIRAM. Another lie. Bring the ball and put it in those damned hands again.

BRAHMAN. Don't. Don't.

GHASHIRAM. Then confess, Brahman. Did you steal or not?

BRAHMAN *(moaning)*. No.

GHASHIRAM. No? Then take the ball in your hands. Take the test. Pass the ordeal. Bring the ball over here. Grab his hands.

BRAHMAN *(in fear of his life)*. Don't! I did it! I confess that I stole. *(Ghashiram laughs loudly.)*

GHASHIRAM *(to those around him)*. You should be so clever! See how a thief confesses. Go. Cut off his hands and drive him out of Poona. I'll see to it that no Brahman steals! *Ghashiram goes out smoothing his moustache.*

BRAHMAN *(in torment)*. I did not steal, I did not steal, I did not steal. O Ghashiram. You have tormented a poor innocent Brahman. You'll die without children! You yourself will endure torment greater than mine. You'll die a dog's death, grinding your heels in the dirt.

*While he is groaning this, sutradhar and the Brahman line suddenly start chanting:*

*Radhakrishna Hari Mukunda Murari.*

*They begin the chant with instruments as if wanting to drown the screams. The Brahman line stands, covering the stage. The scene disappears behind the line and the sound fades, except for the chant.*

SUTRADHAR. Revenues.

OTHERS. Increased.

SUTRADHAR. Crime.

OTHERS. Decreased.

SUTRADHAR. The city of Poona began to tremble at Ghashiram's name.

OTHERS. Just his name.

SUTRADHAR. Thieves and adulterers went straight!

OTHERS. Even the big ones were cowed!

SUTRADHAR. The bad deeds were cooled down—The good deeds were cooled down too!

OTHERS. Ghashiram Raj is here. Ghashiram Raj is here.

GHASIRAM (*enters smoothing moustache*). I've got the Kotwali and I've got Poona straightened out! All these hard, proud Brahmins are soft as cotton now. No one dares to look Ghashiram straight in the eye! Now, once I find a fitting husband for my darling daughter—that piece of my heart named Lalita Gauri—and get her married, then everything will be the way I want it. I'll make such a show of the wedding that no one's tongue will dare utter one bad word about my daughter. And if some tongue starts wagging, it's easy to cut it off! Now—first—I'll look for a bridegroom. It's easy to find a bridegroom when one has money, jewels, and respect! And my daughter's beautiful—one in a million! I'll send my men out right now to look for a husband and I'll arrange everything. (*Goes.*)

*At the back of the stage, the Brahman line starts singing 'Shri Ganaraya'. A mendicant—one of the men from the*

*Brahman line, the one from the first scene—begins to walk off in a hurry.*

SUTRADHAR. Bhatji buwa! Bhatji buwa! Stop.

BHATJI. Go away. I have no time.

SUTRADHAR. What's the big Brahman work you've pulled off today?

BHATJI. Asking me's a bad omen. You've done me wrong!

SUTRADHAR. Born? Who's been born? Daughter or son?

bhatji. Enough of your fun. Come on, let me go.

SUTRADHAR. Bhatji buwa! Who?

BHATJI. Who What? How who?

SUTRADHAR. Whose?

BHATJI. Whose what? Carriage?

SUTRADHAR. (*claps his hands*). I've got it! It's just propped into my head!

BHATJI. Drop dead! I'd better go.

SUTRADHAR. Who's marrying whom? Bhatji buwa! Tell me.

BHATJI. Your mother is marrying her husband! I've got to go. I'm late. I'm gone. (*Stays.*)

SUTRADHAR. Looks like a big fee.

BHATJI. So? Look who's getting married! (*Pause.*) But how did you know?

SUTRADHAR. You told me!

BHATJI. What! Me? I told you Nana's getting married? Oh *Shiva, Shiva!*

SUTRADHAR. (*claps hands*). Nana's getting married!

BHATJI. You! You! (*Comic, prissy, impotent rage.*) Awful man!

SUTRADHAR. Nana's having his seventh marriage! True or false, Bhatji buwa?

BHATJI. Oh, not so loud. It'll cost me my life.

SUTRADHAR. How so?

BHATJI. Now go! I'm going to the palace. They're making plans. It's almost about to happen. But it's still a secret. If he knows I told, he'll peel my skin raw. Pretend you never saw me. I'm going. The girl is just turning fourteen. How about that!

SUTRADHAR. (*groans*). Oh no! Yes. You may go. This ear does not know what that ear heard. (*Bhatji hurries off. Sutradhar tries to follow.*) Bhatji buwa! Bhatji buwa! (*Then he stops.*) Hey! Another Bhatji buwa is going. That's two. A third! Fourth! Fifth! Sixth! Seventh! Twenty-seven and a half (*In all sorts of comic ways, the various pandits go off the stage.*)

SUTRADHAR. On this day, Nana's seventh wedding ceremony is almost ready.

OTHERS. Almost ready.

SUTRADHAR. The wedding is ready, the wedding is ready, Nana's wedding is ready.

OTHERS. It is ready.

*On stage the traditional rites and hubbub that precede a wedding are mimed.*

SUTRADHAR (*sings to rhythm of hand drum*).

My Nana's wedding!

The bride's a young one!

My Nana's wedding!

A tender blossoming bride.

A slender willowy bride.

A shy lily-white bride.

A just-this-year ripened bride.

My Nana's wedding!

*(Miming of wedding preparations on stage.)*

Brahmans come to check the stars.

*(Repeated until mime catches up.)*

The guests arrive.

The pavilion rises.

The jewels are brought.

With all due ceremony.

The trumpets sound.

My Nana's wedding!

Just ripe this year!

My Nana's wedding!

*(On stage: pre-wedding rites.)*

SUTRADHAR (*traditional song*).

Let's go to the wedding.

Let's go to the wedding.

*(The Brahman line chants during the mime.)*

Let's go to the wedding (*four times*).

Sakhubai.

Salubai.

Kalubai.

Saibai.

Let's go to the wedding.

The Peshwa's chief minister.

Still young enough to marry!

His moustache's turned gray.

But not all his teeth are gone—

not all of them are gone.

He's got six wives.

Look—that's not enough!

So he's got a new one.

She needs a companion.

So—

Sakhubai, Salubai, Kalubai, Saibai.

Let's go to the wedding.

*The mime goes on. The bride is brought in. Her face is not visible under the garlands. The Sutradhar keeps on singing the traditional song. Suddenly he stops and all sing.*

ALL TOGETHER. Let's go to the wedding.

Sound the cymbals.

Shake the tambourines.

Beat the drums.

Dance at the wedding.

*(Head garlanded, Nana is brought in.)*

The groom comes over the threshold.

How did the groom get his bride?

He gave three hundred gold coins.

And so he bought the bride.

My Nana's wedding.

The groom has come near the altar.

How did the groom get his bride?

He gave a great big gift of land!

That's how he bought his bride.

*On the stage, they hold the cloth between the two. The Sutradhar sings the wedding shloka. The Englishman comes in and watches. At the end, the line: 'Shubh mangala sawadhan—Make sure of the sacred omen!' The band plays—loudly. Ghashiram comes in hurriedly, terribly perturbed. People disperse. Nana and his bride go in procession around the stage and into the wings, not noticing Ghashiram. The Englishman is in the procession.*

GHASHIRAM *(while the procession goes into the wing)*. Where is my daughter? Where is she?

*The procession disappears. Ghashiram is left alone on the stage.*

GHASHIRAM *(disturbed)*. Where is my baby, where is she? Nana, now you and I have to decide this.

*Goes off as if on Nana's trail. The Brahman line chants from the wing: 'Ramashiva Hari, Mukunda Murari'. On the other side, Nana and the new bride come in as if entering a bedroom. She stands to one side, trembling. Nana takes off his coat. He pushes up his sleeves. Full of lust. He goes to her and starts fondling her. She trembles even more.*

NANA. Now, now, don't be shy. Don't be shy. Womenfolk shouldn't be so shy. Enough of your shyness! *(He tries to embrace her. Ghashiram springs in from the rear like a tiger, sword in hand.)*

GHASHIRAM. Nanasaheb, where is my Gauri?

NANA. Eh! *(Startled, too startled to speak)* Who ? Gha . . . Ghashi?

GHASHIRAM. Where is my daughter, Nanasaheb?

NANA. She might be . . . she might be . . . anywhere. I haven't seen her. I was busy with the wedding.

GHASHIRAM. Nanasaheb, tell me the truth . . .

NANA *(noticing Ghashiram's state)*. No . . . No . . . Ghashi . . . No . . . Listen!

GHASHIRAM. Just tell me where my child is, Nanasaheb. That's all. No one has seen her for ten days.

NANA. I really . . . don't know . . . Ghashi.

GHASHIRAM *(aggressive)*. Tell me right now. Or . . .

NANA. Yes. I'll tell you. She . . . She . . . She . . . To Chandra the midwife!

GHASHIRAM *(a terrible cruel face)*. What! *(Nana is scared. His new wife is frightened. For a moment it looks as if Ghashiram will tear Nana apart. But he doesn't)*. Chandra the midwife in Kasba Peth.

NANA *(still scared)*. Yes, that one. *(Ghashiram gets hold of himself and hurries off. Nana draws a deep breath, then becomes composed. Speaks to his wife.)* Are you afraid, dear?

What could that Ghashya have done to this Nana? All his ancestors would have to descend and help him. All of them. We could finish him off with just a gesture of this hand. Come on. Let's go. *(He takes her inside. As he goes one of his legs trembles a little.)* One of my legs has fallen asleep. *(Stops and claps his hands.)* Someone come!

SUTRADHAR *(comes in)*. Yes?

NANA. Don't let that Ghashya enter these chambers again. Do you understand? Add more watchmen. Increase our bodyguards. Go.

*Nana leads his bride towards the wing. From the other side of the stage, Ghashiram enters. He pushes in front of him a dark woman who is hiding her face in the end of her sari, Chandra the midwife.*

GHASHIRAM. Where is my dear child? Tell me, where is she?

CHANDRA *(frightened)*. There—we buried her there . . .

GHASHIRAM. Where? Here? *(He sits and acts as if digging in the soil like an animal. Then he goes aside, mimes bringing a spade and digging in short stabs. He sees something and covers his face.)*

Oh, my child, My Gauri. A Piece of my heart. Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! What has become of you? What happened? What did that devil Nana do? That monster. *(He stands up. Pushes the soil with his feet. Murder in his eyes. He becomes aware of Chandra. She trembles in fear.)*

You took the life of my dear child . . . *(He grabs her throat, chokes her to death, throws her down.)*

Die. Go to hell! *(He sits and cries like a child.)* Gauri, my dear—what happened to you, my daughter? How can I face your mother? What have I done? No, I didn't do anything. I didn't. Nana did all this. Nana, my enemy. Come on, you

bastard, come. *(Nana comes, frightened, but with defiance. He stands still. Ghashiram looks at him murderously for a moment and then with incredulity.)* Who? Nana—sahib. . .

NANA *(gulping but with courage)*. It is I. *(Comes forward.)* Ghashya, how much more will you grieve? Now be calm. Whatever happened, protocol should not be forgotten. Don't forget that. Whom do you stand before? First you must bow. Now—bow. *(Ghashiram acts like a tamed animal. He bows, but murder is still in his eyes.)*

That's right. Good. We acknowledge your loyalty. By our favour, you have become Kotwal. We are pleased with that.

GHASHIRAM. But, Nanasahib . . .

NANA *(comes towards Ghashiram gingerly. Ghashiram looks at him unblinkingly, with wide-open red eyes. Nana cautiously puts his hand on his back.)*. We understand what has befallen you, Ghashya.

GHASHIRAM. But, Nanasahib, what have you done?

NANA. This is your misapprehension, nothing else. He—the Omnipresent—He makes everything happen . . . We are merely instrument . . . Enough, Ghashya, We offer our condolences.

GHASHIRAM *(pulls back with a jerk.)*. You deceive me, Nanasahib. You did this. You took my child's life. My only child. My innocent darling . . . You killed . . .

NANA *(drawing back)*. Are you mad, you fool! Ghashya, child. These hands have never killed even an insect . . . In these hands is only the flute of Lord Krishna which made the Gopis forget hunger and thirst. *(With a flourish)* And you should think before you accuse the Peshwa's chief minister. Are you thinking clearly, Ghashya? To whom do you speak with such insubordination? The Peshwa's chief minister stands before you, Ghashya—



GHASHIRAM (*murder has not left his mind but the he is numb*).  
Nanasahib.

NANA. Oh, now what's this 'Nanasahib, Nanasahib!' Let's forget what's happened. All merges into the Ganga. Thou shalt not grieve over what is gone. The Vedas have said that. After all, Ghashya, will we live forever? (*Sighs*.) We too, every one of us, will leave, Ghashya . . . This body is earth, just dirt. You cannot rely upon it. What comes, goes. Four handfuls of ash remain.

GHASHIRAM. But . . . my daughter.

NANA. It is a misapprehension to think that she was here. It was illusion. The body will burn. It is misapprehension to think that she is no longer here. Death is without meaning, Ghashya. Life, too, is without meaning. No one belongs to anyone. No one is anyone's daughter. No one is anyone's father. In the end, only oneself belongs to oneself. Life is a dance of four day's charm. One must do one's duty. That's enough. I am the Chief Minister. You are the Kotwal. These are our duties. So go, go to your duty. There is a great trust given to you, Ghashya. The responsibility of all Poona is yours alone. Ghashya, we are very pleased with you. Go—go to your work. We also go. Before you go, don't forget to bow . . . (*Nana stands with much more self-confidence, but his leg is trembling*.)

And yes, no more need be said concerning this. What has happened, has happened. All the world need not know. Your good name. Your reputation is our reputation. Anyone's saying strange things about the Peshwa's Kotwal would be unbrahmanical. Every care should be taken that no one anywhere speaks of this. If you hear a gossipmonger, don't wait a second longer—cut off his head! This shall not come to the

Peshwa's ear—that is my responsibility. Now go, Ghashi. Go. (*Ghashiram goes numbly*.)

Stay, Ghashi, you've made a mistake. You forgot to bow, you fool. (*Ghashiram bows*.)

Very good. It should be done right. You didn't mean it as a slight, now, did you? (*Ghashiram goes humbly. Nana claps his hands. Sutradhar comes in*.)

NANA. Remove Gauri's corpse and throw it in the river. If anyone finds so much as a bone, I'll break your bones . . . Nana begins to dance with a flourish. Sutradhar stands. Three men come. They sadly mime wrapping Gauri's body in a cloth and throwing it in the river. In the rear, the line forms and sings tenderly: 'Radhakrishna Hari, Ho, Mukunda Murari'.

(*Repeat*.) This low singing goes on, Sutradhar comes forward.

SUTRADHAR. Gauri went. Nana stays. Ghashiram engraved the sorrow of Gauri on his heart. The Kotwal's work must go on.

OTHERS. It must go on.

SUTRADHAR. Reputation—must be preserved.

OTHERS. Be preserved.

SUTRADHAR. Authority—must be preserved.

OTHERS. Be preserved.

SUTRADHAR. Trouble-makers must tremble.

OTHERS. Must tremble.

SUTRADHAR. So that crime may be prevented. All—thieves and good people, the religious and the irreverent—all must be ruled strictly.

OTHERS. Ruled strictly, without a second thought.

SUTRADHAR. Without a second thought. No one should pity Ghashiram Kotwal because his unmarried daughter died when she was pregnant.

OTHERS. No one should pity him.

*In the wings Ghashiram growls: 'Son of a pig. You are laughing at me. You laugh. Why? Tell me, why? You just wait. I'll smash your face'. Someone bellows like a cow in pain. Ghashiram says: 'Go. Die. I warn you—don't touch him'. He comes on stage. Looks different. Blood on his hands.*

GHASHIRAM (looking at the blood the audience does not see).

Feels good! (Wanders on the stage, looking at the blood on his hands.)

SUTRADHAR. Days go by, nights go by.

OTHERS. His style has changed for the worse. (Repeat.)

SUTRADHAR. The way a wounded tiger becomes addicted to blood, so the Kotwal has come to love the smell.

OTHERS. The Kotwal has acquired a penchant for human blood.

SUTRADHAR. Satisfaction he'll never find, but nothing else delights his mind.

OTHERS. Nothing else delights the mind.

SUTRADHAR. The Kotwal for the slightest reason beats and kills in any season.

SUTRADHAR. The mouths of Poona people were dry with fear.

OTHERS. Dry with fear.

SUTRADHAR. No one's life was guaranteed. Fear cut life in half, indeed!

OTHERS. Half a life, half a life, indeed.

*(During this, Ghashiram has gone inside.)*

SUTRADHAR. The situation was thus: no one knew where to complain. *Brahman line suddenly starts. 'But the red light district was full of fun and games. 'Radhakrishna Hari, Govinda Murali'. Chanting goes on. Others form the line put on their turbans and join the tow in the dance. The*

*Bavannakhani scene is like the earlier one. From the wings come moaning, shrieks, hubbub. But Gulabi dances and sings lavani. Nana gives her his bracelet, pearl necklace. Both dance off stage.*

SUTRADHAR. Pundalika Varda Hari Vitthal, Namdev, Takaram. Half the line disperses and comes forward acting out a group of foreign Brahmans coming to Poona. The other half start singing in South Indian style. After they stop, one says in a Tanjore accent: 'Pandit—this is the city of Poona, isn't it?'

SUTRADHAR. Yes, this is the brutish city.

STRANGER (not understanding). What, the British city?

SUTRADHAR. What they call the city of Poona, this is it.

THIRD STRANGER. Much pleased, much pleased. Place to stay found.

FOURTH STRANGER. City of Poona. City of future. City of luck.

SUTRADHAR. Bad luck.

THIRD STRANGER. We've heard—lucky city.

SECOND STRANGER. Peshwa is merciful. Lion of giving. We heard—far away.

FIRST STRANGER. We poor. Came here asking way.

SUTRADHAR. You've come. (Sarcastically) That's just great. I hope fate gives you what you want. This is the city of Poona, gentleman.

THIRD STRANGER. So happy. Free place to stay?

SUTRADHAR. There's no dharmasala near here. But stay in that garden . . . No, no, not that one. That's the Kotwal's. Don't ever go anywhere near there. Stay in the one by the Ganesh temple. Spend the night. Find your fortune, if you can. But be careful. Ram. Ram.

*Sutradhar goes. The others relax as if they have reached the gardens. They lie down, sit down. One or another: 'Poona*

*City'. 'Very beautiful'. 'Very nice'. 'Like the gold city of Lanka'. They point at one place or another. 'Parvati'. 'Chaturshringi'. 'Very beautiful'.*

ONE (agitated). I'm hungry.

ANOTHER. Hungry.

THIRD. Hungry. (*Looking upstage, brightens.*) Mangoes! Fruit!

FOURTH. Sweet fruit! (*They all happily wander over to the other garden.*)

GHASHIRAM (*bellowing from inside*). Who's that? Who's stealing fruit? (*Enters on a horse. All come confusedly together, eating imaginary fruit.*)

Now I've got you. Caught you red-handed, bastards. Who stole the fruit from the Kotwal's gardens? Rogues, thieves, rascals.

(*No one knows this is the Kotwal. They look at each other.*) Straighten up, all of you. (*They stand up wherever they are, but keep on eating the fruit.*) Stand up, I said. (*They don't pay much attention. Putting his hand to his moustache and biting his lips*) Breaking the Kotwal's rules! And disrespectful! (*Summons guards. Sutradhar and other become guards and come.*)

Take them all. Look them all in the empty cell by the Kotwal's office for the night. I'll do justice to them in the morning. Take them off. (*The soldiers grab them roughly. Now they are startled. They don't understand what has happened. The guards shove and push them along.*)

GHASHIRAM. Bastards—stealing the Kotwal's fruit! (*Goes out on his horse. The soldiers put the Brahmans in a cell offstage and shut and lock an imaginary door on stage.*)

SUTRADHAR (*coming back from the wings, says to his companion, coughing, as if he were the guard who put them in*).

Ranba, the cell is too small and there are too many people, I think. I had to pack them in. They didn't fit until I shoved them in—like this. What days! Not enough prison cells in Poona. This is the Kali Yuga, the Dark Age. Come on, let's have a pipe and sleep until morning. (*He goes, coughing. They all go and come back as Sutradhar and Brahman line.*)

SUTRADHAR. Night falls.

OTHERS. Falls.

SUTRADHAR. Midnight comes.

OTHERS. Comes.

SUTRADHAR. The city of Poona is lost in sleep.

OTHERS. Lost in sleep.

*Someone imitates a howling dog. And another. A third imitates a night patrol cry. The sounds become faint.*

*From the cell: 'Help me. I'm dying. Can't breathe. Let me breathe. Mother! Somebody help...' Noise of suffocation.*

SUTRADHAR. The Brahmans in the cell can't get enough air.

They are suffocating. They are moaning. They are in torment. They're calling for help. But who will help? Everyone's asleep. The guards are high on opium. During the night, some of the Brahmans died.

OTHERS. Died.

SUTRADHAR. Some of them half dead, were unconscious, started counting their last moments.

OTHERS. It's daybreak.

*From the wings, moans. Someone from the line crows like a rooster. A Brahman hurriedly puts his turban on, muttering mantras. A cowherd calls his imaginary cows. Some more moans. Now a Maratha landowner comes in on a horse, hears the moans and pauses. Gets off his horse and goes to the prison. Runs back to the stage, excited.*

SARDAR (*calling*). Hey, is anybody there? Come! Run! Come here quickly! Run! Run! (*A Brahman from the line runs up.*) Break open that cell. People are suffocating inside. Break it open! Break it open! Bring them out. (*All run to the cell.*)

SUTRADHAR. The cell has been opened.

OTHERS. Opened.

SUTRADHAR. Twenty-two dead, the rest half dead. All are brought out.

*A mime of pulling out corpses. The mime goes according to the lines:*

OTHERS. Brought out.

SUTRADHAR. The Sardar begins to ask questions. Who put them in the cell?

OTHERS. Ghashiram Kotwal.

SUTRADHAR. Sardar Phakade is Ghashiram's enemy. He has a ready-made opportunity now.

OTHERS. A golden chance!

SUTRADHAR. He picked up the corpses, threw them down before the Peshwa, said 'Sir, give justice. Ghashiram suffocated these men. The crime?'

OTHERS. Stole fruit.

SUTRADHAR. 'Your Highness, a penalty of death for stealing fruit. What kind of justice is this?'

OTHERS. 'The justice of the dark city. That of the dark city.'

SUTRADHAR. 'What sort of reign is this?'

OTHERS. 'It's a Mughal reign, a Mughal reign, a Mughal reign.'

SUTRADHAR. 'And who rules here? Your or—'

OTHERS. 'Ghashiram.'

SUTRADHAR. His Highness became furious, sent a message to Nana: 'Come to the palace now, as you are.'

OTHERS. But...

*Nana comes on stage, dancing a little and muttering his morning ritual. He calls to the wing: 'Tell him we got the message. Tell His Highness we'll finish our morning prayers and come'. Holding his sacred thread and muttering prayers, he goes to the other wing and sits as if doing puja.*

SUTRADHAR. The chief minister is busy. The Peshwa waits for him. When will the minister come? The news spreads through Poona...

*In the Brahman line, low voices: 'Twenty-two', 'Brahman', 'Ghashiram', 'Murdered', 'Suffocated'—such words are muttered back and forth. Suddenly all this rises to a din. A tone of anger. Fists in the air. Pandemonium.*

SUTRADHAR. Poona Brahmans are furious.

OTHERS. Furious.

SUTRADHAR. They come to Nana's mansion.

*On the side, Nana is doing puja. On the other side, the mob grows louder. Sutradhar runs over to Nana.*

SUTRADHAR (*bowing*). Sir, bad news. Angry Brahmans have gathered in front of the palace.

NANA (*confused*). Huh! Angry Brahmans have gathered? What are you waiting for? Close the doors. Post some more guards.

SUTRADHAR. The Brahmans are furious, sir. They are chanting. 'Let's go in'. There are thousands of them.

NANA. Entering my m-m-mansion? Don't let them.

SUTRADHAR. It's a serious situation!

NANA. Do a special puja. Pray to the Gods. Make a deal with the gods. Promise them anything.

SUTRADHAR. The Brahmans won't listen.

NANA. What do they want? What do they want?

SUTRADHAR. An order to behead Ghashiram Kotwal.

NANA (*stands in suspense. Suddenly a little jump*). Oh shit, is that all? Bring my pen, you idiot. Bring paper. (*Takes the instrument and writes.*) Take this. Take it. Give it to them. The order for Ghashya's death. Give it to 'em. Tell them to be happy. Tell them to humiliate him all they want. Run!

*Sutradhar goes to the other corner of the stage.*

SUTRADHAR. Brahmans! Ho! Listen! Listen! As per your demands, the Peshwa's chief minister Nana Phadnavis has given the order for Ghashiram Kotwal's execution. First shave his head and anoint it with *sindur*. Then run him around town on a camel. Tie him to an elephant's leg and lastly give him the sentence of death. At the very end, tie one of his hands behind his back and let Ghashiram Savaldas face the mob.

*The Brahman line shouts will glee. At the other end of the stage, Nana is happy. The mob goes inside to the beat of a dholki.*

NANA. Use a thorn to take out a thorn. That's great. The disease has been stopped. Anyway, he was no use any more. (*Dances a little as he moves off stage.*)

SUTRADHAR. Ghashiram's time has come.

OTHERS (*coming on stage*). The tide has turned. His good luck's gone.

SUTRADHAR. But—he doesn't know it yet! Even though Ghashiram ordered the Brahmans to be arrested, he didn't put them in jail himself. But...

OTHERS. His good luck's gone; his time has come.

SUTRADHAR. The Kotwal doesn't know. The Kotwal doesn't... *Ghashiram comes in.*

GHASHIRAM. Who's on watch? Who's there? Where have all the bastards gone? (*Sutradhar as guard comes in coughing, rubbing eyes.*)

GHASHIRAM. Bastard, what have you been doing? Come on, open the cell. I'll show those fruit stealers what justice is! *The Sutradhar goes to the wings coughing and rubbing his eyes and comes back hastily.*

SUTRADHAR. Sir, terrible news. The cell is empty.

GHASHIRAM. What! (*Stiffens.*) Idiot. And what were you doing! Who broke into the cell? How? Tell me! I'll skin the culprits, I'll hang them upside down—over a fire. I'll have their heads on a pike!

*Suddenly, on stage and off stage, angry shouts. In a moment the mob gathers aggressively, fiercely, in front of Ghashiram. Ghashiram is confused. Loud mob sounds.*

GHASHIRAM (*shouting*). Stop! Stop right there. What is it? What's happened? What's all this noise? Quiet, you fools. (*For a moment the mob is stunned*) Go on back. Go back. Go on. Or I'll rip every one of you apart.

*The mob begins to surround him one step at a time. Ghashiram starts backing, as if surrounded by animals, and the mob encircles him. Suddenly, a great shout. Ghashiram cannot be seen. The mob's jungle sounds fade out. The mob members with their backs to the audience turn around and the line forms. Ghashiram has disappeared.*

SUTRADHAR. The mob got Ghashiram Kotwal.

OTHERS. They got him. They got him.

SUTRADHAR. They beat him.

They shaved his head.

They *sindur*-daubed his head.

They rode him around on a camel.

They tied him to the leg of an elephant.

The city of Poona watched it all.

OTHERS. They watched it all. They watched it all. With big round eyes they watched it all.

SUTRADHAR. And in the end came The End.

*Ghashiram, one hand tied behind his back, comes on stage. He has been beaten. Disfigured. Bloodied*

Ghashiram was thrown in front of the Brahmins with one hand tied behind his back.

*The Brahmin line crouches like hunters. Once in a while they give a shout or mime an action such as throwing stones.*

GHASHIRAM. Hit me. Beat me. Beat me some more. Hit me!

*(Suddenly Ghashiram shields his face as if a stone hit him.)*

Why stay so far away? Come on, you cowards. Still scared?

I spit on you. Beat me. Come on, beat me. Come on. Come on. Stone me, cowards. Pig shit! Come on and beat me. I dare you. Hit me. Look—one of my hands is tied. And you're scared! Come on, beat me. Crush me! *(The mob yells.)*

Ghashiram Savaldas! Ghashiram Savaldas! I danced on your chests but I wasted the life of my little daughter. I should be punished for the death of my daughter. Beat me. Beat me. Hit me. Cut off my hands and feet. Crack my skull. Come on, come on. Look! I'm here. Oh, that's good. Very good.

*The mob shouts. The drums beat loud and fast. Ghashiram begins to move in a sort of dance as if dying to the beat of the drum. Falls, gets up, falls, growls like an animal. Crawls. Jerks in spasms. Falls and falls again while trying to rise. Death dance. The crowd's shouting continues. Finally Ghashiram lies motionless. Nana enters in a palanquin with the chief minister's pomp. Royal clothing. Gets down from the palanquin and raises on hand to calm the crowd.*

NANA. Ladies and gentlemen. Citizens of Poona. A threat to the great city of Poona has been ended today. *(The crowd cheers.)* A disease has been controlled. The demon Ghashya Kotwal, who plagued all of us, has met his death. Everything

has happened according to the wishes of the gods. The mercy of the gods is with us always.

*(He nudges the corpse of Ghashiram with his walking stick.)*

Let the corpse of sinful Ghashya rot. Let the wolves and dogs have it. Let the worms have it. Whoever attempts to take away this corpse will be punished. Whoever mourns for him will be hanged. All living relatives of Ghashya Savaldas will be found, bound, and expelled from the city. We have ordered that from this day forward, not a word, not a stone relating to the sinner shall survive. We have commanded that there be festivities for three days to mark this happy occasion.

*The crowd shouts. Cheers. The line forms. Cymbals. Red powder. Festivity. Now Gulabi comes in dancing. Nana's wives come dancing. Nana joins, dancing. The crowd dances.*

ALL TOGETHER. Ganapati dances the Ganapati dance.

Brahmins of Poona bow and prance.

Now sound the drum beat!

Now let the drama heat!

Heaven, hell and earth—complete!

Shri Ganaraya...

## NOTES

### *Act One*

Act One creates the atmosphere of general debauchery with its erotic songs and dances and the depiction of the district of the prostitutes. It presents Nana Phadnavis as the presiding deity of these celebrations, shows the dominant position of the Brahmans, the privileges granted to them and their regular violations of the Brahman code. It also portrays Ghashiram, first as the ordinary man making a living, an outsider in Poona, and then his humiliation, the deal with Nana and the sacrifice of his daughter, and his eventual transformation to become the Kotwal of Poona.

**Ganapati:** The Hindu god, Ganesh. He is the divine scribe to whom Valmiki dictated the Ramayana. He is also the god who blesses all beginnings. Also called Ganaraya in the play.

**Blessers of Pundalik . . . Tukaram:** All poet saints who are blessed by Ganapati.

**Sutradhar:** A characteristic and important figure in Indian theatrical performances, the sutradhar or narrator is one who holds the 'sutra' or thread of a story. He is a detached observer, who comments as he watches, but may also blend into the story of the play by taking on, temporarily, several successive roles. In this play for instance, the sutradhar becomes the Haridasa, a prisoner, and the man-with-the-pregnant-wife, reverting back to the role of the sutradhar after each performance.

**Brahmans from Poona:** The play is set in the principality of Poona, which was under the administration of Nana Phadnavis. The Brahmans belonged to the ruling class of the time.

**Vedantic scholar:** One who studies the Vedanta, Hindu monistic philosophy based on the Vedas.

**Vaidya doctor:** Vaidya or doctor is a word common to many Indian languages.

**Shringeri . . . We're Poona people:** Brahmans from all these places have come and been naturalized as 'Poona people' unlike the newly arrived Ghashiram, the Brahman from Kanauj.

**Bhatji buwa:** A form of address specifically for the Brahman and used many times in the play. It contains both the caste designation and the respect seen as due to the class in power.

**Bhatji maharaj:** Similar term of respectful address.

**Bavannakhani:** Later referred to as Prostitute's Lane, this is the area of the city where the prostitutes and dancing girls pursue their trade.

**Is this the Peshwai or the Mughal Kingdom:** The distinctions of caste strictly adhered to in a predominantly Hindu region would naturally not be recognized anywhere else or given the same degree of respect. In the Peshwa's regime the Brahmans were specially privileged. This is said in surprise and shock to someone who does not seem to know that the Brahman is naturally placed above him.

**Riding backward . . . head:** Refers to the humiliation that could follow a social transgression like 'bumping into a Brahman.' At the end of the play this is part of the punishment given to Ghashiram.

**Omen:** Sign. This too seems to be a part of the code by which the Brahmans are ruled – things that can be done and things that are taboo and cannot even be mentioned.

I have to go to the temple: Note how all the Brahmans who are headed towards Bavannakhani pretend to be going to other places, like the graveyard and the temple where the Brahman may be said to have legitimate work. This attempt on the part of the Brahmans to hide their real destination contributes to the general atmosphere of decadence in the play.

Kirtan: Religious chant or song.

Viswamitra and Menaka: Viswamitra was one of the seven great rishis, of royal lineage, the son of a kshatriya. The rivalry between Viswamitra and another great sage Vasishtha is referred to both in the *Rig Veda* and the *Ramayana*. In the *Ramayana*, Vasishtha humiliates Viswamitra and in a bid to take revenge, Viswamitra undertakes severe penance to increase his power. Finally, alarmed by his success, Indra, the king of the gods sends the heavenly nymph, Menaka, to disturb his meditation, tempt him with her physical charms and lead him astray. This mythical story as the topic of the sermon is significant because the Brahmans are shown yielding to the temptations of the flesh.

Since when have women been doing kirtan: Traditionally men performed the kirtan or religious chant. Women, generally, are not allowed to take the lead in religious rituals or preach a sermon. The comment here is mock serious, particularly against the picture of Bavannakhani where the women dance and sing and the men watch and listen.

Lavani: Popular love song accompanied by erotic dancing. The lavani form part of the tamasha.

Mridanga-drum: Usually played in accompaniment to the kirtan or religious chant.

Ram Shiva Hari...Krishna: The chant of "Ram Shiva Hari...." changes to "Bavannakhani Mathura avatarli", the kirtan changing to the lavani.

Brahman/Brahman wife dance: This seems to be the ultimate in erotic presentation, exciting the audience of Brahmans.

Saucy: Provocative. This is particularly interesting as it is applied to the Brahman wife who is believed to have been left alone in the house by the Brahman.

Bavannakhani/mathura avatarli: Bavannakhani, the district of the prostitutes transforms into Mathura. It is in this blasphemous light that the Brahmans of Poona would like to present their own attraction for the women of Bavannakhani, and their intention is further strengthened by Nana's participation in the celebrations there. They follow their leader and therefore they cannot be wrong. This convenient confusion of the religious and the profane is shown throughout the play.

Brahman from Kanauj: A Brahman from the northern part of the country. This identification, as also the different hairstyle, sets Ghashiram apart as an outsider, a fact that Nana will exploit later.

Palanquin: A covered litter, carried by two or four men. Usually a mode of travel for women or for high officials. Note that the white man who appears on stage a little later also comes in a palanquin.

Classical raga Bhupali: In the two Indian systems of classical music, Carnatic and Hindustani, there are different ragas for different times of the day. The raga Bhupali of the Hindustani system, is one of a group that is sung or played on an instrument to herald the dawn.



The Sahib is coming: The British officer. Nana is known to have kept open house for the British in Poona. In Act Two a British officer also attends Nana's seventh wedding.

Butt in: Interfere.

Shysters: Persons without any professional pride. Here a reference to the Brahmans degrading themselves by offering such low rates to the Sahib.

Dakshina: Gifts or money given both in honour and as alms. As is evident this is a privilege that is reserved for the Brahmans.

Where is your shaven head....when did you last fast: This is a reference to the strict code by which the Brahmans (and indeed all castes) were regulated. The typical Brahman look is briefly assumed by Ghashiram in the Brahman/Brahman wife dance, earlier in the play.

Huzur: Respectfully addressing the British officer.

Wiggle like a butchered goat: A newly butchered or beheaded goat will thrash about for a while as its heart continues to beat.

Otherwise it's all the same: The Sutradhar as a prisoner here cynically comments on the justice that they might expect. It matters little whether or not one has committed a crime. The outcome will depend on the police not on the establishment of guilt or innocence. The sutradhar continues in this vein for a few more lines. See also the sentiment expressed in the sentence: "If a thief wants to live/ To the police he's got to give". His comments capture the essence of the common perception of the police in our own time as well.

Kawali: Sufi devotional song, believed to have originated with Amir Khusro. The language of the kawali used here is Hindi, but compositions were also in Persian, Brijbhasha, and Urdu.

Shudra: The lowest caste. For the play this acknowledgment of debasement prefigures Ghashiram's willingness to trade his daughter for the sake of power over his tormentors in Poona. He seems to see his humiliation as largely caused by the Brahmans of Poona. Note how he consciously transforms himself. And the images he uses to describe the new Ghashiram are, of the devil, the animal, the boar, and for the people of Poona, the pigs.

Shehnai: Versatile wind instrument made of metal and originally used as an accompaniment to vocal music. Raised to the status of a solo instrument by Ustad Bismillah Khan. The mridanga, drum, and shehnai together evoke the atmosphere necessary for a kirtan.

Abhanga: Marathi devotional songs composed by the poet saints. Tukaram alone is believed to have composed some five thousand abhangas.

Ghashiram in servant's dress: He has already transformed himself in the first step to realize his grand design to acquire power over the people of Poona. This is also a change of caste, as he had said, 'I've become a Shudra.'

Lumphead! Dolt!: Terms of abuse, showing contempt for the servant's lack of intelligence.

We had it in our hands – then the prey fled: The neutral pronoun Nana employs here refers to the girl, as if she were an object to be utilized or owned. A little later he again calls her 'precious, precious thing!'

Plays lezim: Plays with the red powder.

Haridasa shawl: Usually saffron coloured shawl with the names of the or Hari or Krishna written in red all over. The sutradhar puts it on to indicate the change of role – see stage

direction: 'he throws a cloth over his shoulder...' at the start of the Ganapati worship above.

Tamasha: Spectacle, obviously referring to the lecherous and corrupt Nana dancing with the fresh young girl.

Nana enters. Helpless: Helpless with lust for Gauri; the thought of not having her with him is more than he can bear at this moment.

It will not do.... bridegroom: This is an important series of arguments put before Nana by Ghashiram before he finally makes the demand for the kotwali, catching Nana at the point when he is 'helpless' without Gauri.

You outcaste!: Used here as a curse but also in reference to Ghashiram's low caste disguise. He is playing a servant.

The Peshwa is still alive: A threat, reminding Nana that he may be all-powerful in Poona but is still an employee of the Peshwa.

Kotwal: An official, equivalent to a police chief. Here the kotwal of Poona is responsible for keeping order in the city and hence the position most appropriate for Ghashiram's purpose of punishing the people of Poona for his humiliation.

You've got me in a narrow pass: Nana acknowledges that Ghashiram has trapped him. The narrow pass between two rocks or mountains is regarded as the best place to set up an attack or an ambush since there is no escape route.

Luscious daughter: Referring to the youthful charms of Gauri. Also recalls the earlier reference by Ghashiram to his own daughter as a peach eaten by Nana. Note how Gauri is always compared to a fresh, full, and delicious fruit.

Countercheck to all those conspirators: Nana is playing the common political game of setting up one faction or person to balance or arrest another.

A stranger...an outsider: Ghashiram, as the play keeps reminding us, is a Brahman from Kanauj, newly arrived in the city of Poona, and therefore not likely to be a part of any of the Brahman factions of Poona.

Luscious peach: Note how the phrase here combines Nana's own word 'luscious' for Gauri and Ghashiram's word 'peach'. The father is as guilty of using Gauri's youth and beauty as is Nana.

Chitpavan Brahmins: One of the five Brahman castes of Maharashtra – Deshastha, Chitpavan, Karhade, Yajurvedi and Kanva.

Drummer: The drummer beats the drum to draw the attention of people and then makes the announcement.

Trumpets. Horns: The booming and resounding produced by these wind instruments herald the arrival of the authority figure, the powerful, arrogant figure of Ghashiram Kotwal.

### **Act Two**

Act Two presents the tyrannical reign of Ghashiram Kotwal, and it is interesting to note that this act opens to the playing of cymbals which produce a crashing sound, though the basic framework of the play is maintained in the Brahman Chorus still singing the *Shri Ganaraya* song. It ends with the death of Ghashiram and the restoration of the Brahmins to their earlier freedom.

Gauri orders, Nana does, Ghashiram's reign is here: As long as Gauri continues to be the object of Nana's passion, Gauri is secure.

No whoring without a permit: The order is against visiting prostitutes without a permit. This is significant in the light of the frenzied visits of the Brahmins to Bavannakhani shown in Act One.

Ghashiram Kotwal says.... A Brahman may not sin without a permit: This list of all the things that are forbidden without a permit is Ghashiram's way of using the already existing but perhaps ignored Brahman code of behaviour against the Brahmans. The request for a permit would allow him to make money and also keep watch. The sense of an omniscient or all seeing eye – a necessary element of political power – is conveyed during the section of the play representing Ghashiram's rule.

Pimp: One who procures women, or works as an agent for the prostitutes, arranging customers for them.

Misdemeanour: Illegal act.

Do no wrong without a permit: This is an ironic comment on the moral degradation presented in the play – the cynicism which works around crimes, sins, corruptions by getting a permit – one which may be bought considering the nature and range of crimes that are legalized by a mere permit.

Sued people: Took them to court.

They are compelled...not to abort: In Act One, the Brahman wife was seen with her lover. Under the new regime, she would not have the opportunity and the question of aborting would not arise.

Ghashiram enters: This scene is a sharp and graphic presentation of Ghashiram's rule. Not contented with being the power behind the forces patrolling the city, he must take a hand in the cleaning operation. This results from his frustration at having sacrificed his daughter, having to stand by and watch as Nana 'devoured her'. His anger at the situation makes him seek out wrongdoers whom he can punish personally, have the satisfaction of doing it himself.

Adulterer: A man who has a relationship with a woman other than his wife.

Whore-monger: A man who visits a whore or a prostitute.

Adulterous city: Refers to the situation in Act One where the Brahmans – men and women – were all engaged in extra-marital relationships.

What are they doing in their homes at this hour of the night?: In implementing his permit raj, Ghashiram must know about everything that is going on within his jurisdiction. This question points to how power is exercised. In order to retain power, the powerful must keep everything under scrutiny.

Respectable woman: In contrast to the prostitutes.

Wedding necklace: The mangalsutra – a string of black beads frequently embellished with gold. The husband gives this to the wife during the marriage ceremony and it is considered the sign of a respectable married woman.

Kotwali: The office of the Kotwal.

Big-headed: Swollen with pride.

Pig-headed: Stupid and stubborn.

Rangapanchami: A festival of colours..

Gather in the special gardens for the royal favours: A reference to the ceremony where dakshina is given.

Catch him. Catch the bastard: Ghashiram, in this repetition of the mishap that resulted in his own humiliation in Act One, treats the accused in exactly the way he was treated, showing how the method of exercising power remains the same even when the individual exercising it is different.

Tulasi: The sacred basil. The shrub and its leaf are considered auspicious and are part of many Hindu religious rituals.

**Shravana commissions:** Brahmins perform many religious ceremonies and in return are given *dakshina*. In this case, the accused is suggesting that the other Brahmin is taking revenge on him for having been invited to perform rituals for which he himself had been first engaged.

**Mahar woman:** A woman from the lowest caste. Sleeping with a Mahar woman is seen as a scandalous thing for a Brahmin.

**Ordeal:** Here a test to establish the truth.

The Brahmin comes in and sits down as if ....: The following scene uses another popular form, the mime, to represent the ordeal.

**Dnyanab:** Monster.

**Tukaram:** Invoking the holy name of the saint.

**Rangoli:** Geometric or floral patterns drawn on the floor with coloured powder, often in preparation for a ceremony – here for the ordeal. The seven rangoli and the bowing to Agni, the Hindu god of fire, gives sanctity to the ordeal, which is otherwise very much akin to police torture. The different kinds of leaves tied to the Brahmin's head add to the ceremony and also suggest a sacrificial victim.

**Water from a Mahar house, water from a Mang house:** Mahar and Mang are the low castes. Water from various kinds of sources are often a necessary part of Hindu religious rituals. Water from seven sources is required at one stage of Hindu marriage ceremonies in many parts of the country, and a popular tradition is to bring clay from the doorstep of a prostitute to fashion the clay idol of the goddess during the Durga puja in Bengal. These are interesting breaks in the otherwise rigid parameters of different castes.

**Heretic:** Non-believer; one who violates the religious code. Here refers to the Brahmin violating the code of his caste in sleeping with a Mahar woman.

Note how the Brahmin line and the chant function here – the way the Brahmin line occupies the stage like a live curtain, shielding and hiding but also revealing when the play demands revelation.

The bad deeds were cooled down – The good deeds were cooled down too: People are now completely stunned and inactive, afraid that any act could be misunderstood or misinterpreted and they could be arrested and punished for some imagined trespass.

I've got Poona straightened out: The frenzied movement, the mobility of Act One is here frozen from fear of the tyrant.

At the back of the stage, the Brahmin line starts singing....: This is a variation of the scene at the beginning of the first Act. The only difference is that the Brahmin is now sneaking off to Nana's seventh wedding.

Oh Shiva! Shiva!: Here, an exclamation of dismay at having been talked into revealing the secret of Nana's marriage.

A tender blossoming bride....: The description of the bride is in terms of fresh flower and fruit, as earlier in the description of Gauri.

A just-this-year ripened bride: A girl who has just entered puberty. As the Brahmin says with great glee to the Sutradhar a few lines earlier, 'The girl is just turning fourteen.'

Brahmins come to check the stars: These are Brahmin astrologers setting an auspicious time for the marriage.

She needs a companion: While Sakhubai and the others are being invited to go and keep the young bride company, the inference could also be that Nana is not going to stop at a seventh wedding. There will be other young brides to follow this one.

On the stage they hold the cloth between the two: This is one step in the elaborate marriage ceremony.

The wedding shloka: The Sanskrit mantra or verses specially chanted at weddings by the presiding Brahman priest. Here the sutradhar doubles up as the priest.

To Chandra the midwife: Obviously Gauri has been abandoned by Nana after she has become pregnant.

As he goes one of his legs trembles a little: This suggests both Nana's age in comparison to his new bride and a nervous reaction from the fear and strain of facing an angry Ghashiram.

Protocol: The rules of behaviour. Here rules that are a necessary part of the hierarchical government structure. The Kotwal is lower in rank to Nana and must therefore bow before him.

He – the Omnipresent – He makes everything happen ....: This convenient and opportunistic use of the name of God is characteristic of Nana. This is also the start of a discourse that roughly paraphrases Krishna's speech to Arjuna on the eve of the battle of Kurukshetra. Arjuna, hesitant to take up arms against a force that included his relations, friends, and teacher is convinced by Lord Krishna, who acted as his charioteer, that man is only an instrument performing acts whose outcome has already been decided by the Creator. On Nana's lips and in the general atmosphere of the play that great and moving speech sounds like a parody.

In these hands is only the flute of Lord Krishna: This is a continuation of the 'Bavannakhani...Mathura avatarli' theme. The blasphemous identification with the Lord Krishna, and especially with one aspect – the leela or play with the gopis – is Nana's interpretation of his own debauchery.

One must do one's duty....: This recalls Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna to concentrate only on action, on doing one's duty. It also reminds Ghashiram of his duties as Kotwal, work that had earlier allowed him to forget how he had bargained away his daughter.

If you hear a gossip-monger...cut off his head...Peshwa's ear: This advice is ostensibly to save the reputation of Ghashiram and his dead daughter, but it is actually designed to save Nana's own skin. His promise of guarding Ghashiram from the wrath of the Peshwa is an attempt to keep his own misdemeanours secret.

Dharmasala: A free place to stay.

Ram. Ram: This repetition of the name of Ram is used both in greeting and in farewell.

It's a Mughal reign: An attempt by the Brahmins to dissociate themselves from the ongoing brutality, playing on Muslim-against-Hindu stereotypes, or stock ideas by one group about the other. The Peshwa's benevolence is also set against Mughal cruelty.

Do a special puja....Make a deal with the gods: This is an appropriate option in the play's corrupt ambience. Nana's deal with Ghashiram would be fresh in the minds of the audience, and his cynical use of religion is characteristic.

Use a thorn to take out a thorn: An echo of the reference to conspirators made by Nana in Act One after he had given

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